IMPROVING THE U.S. MILITARY'S ADAPTABILITY AGAINST THE SALAFIST-JIHADI THREAT

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by

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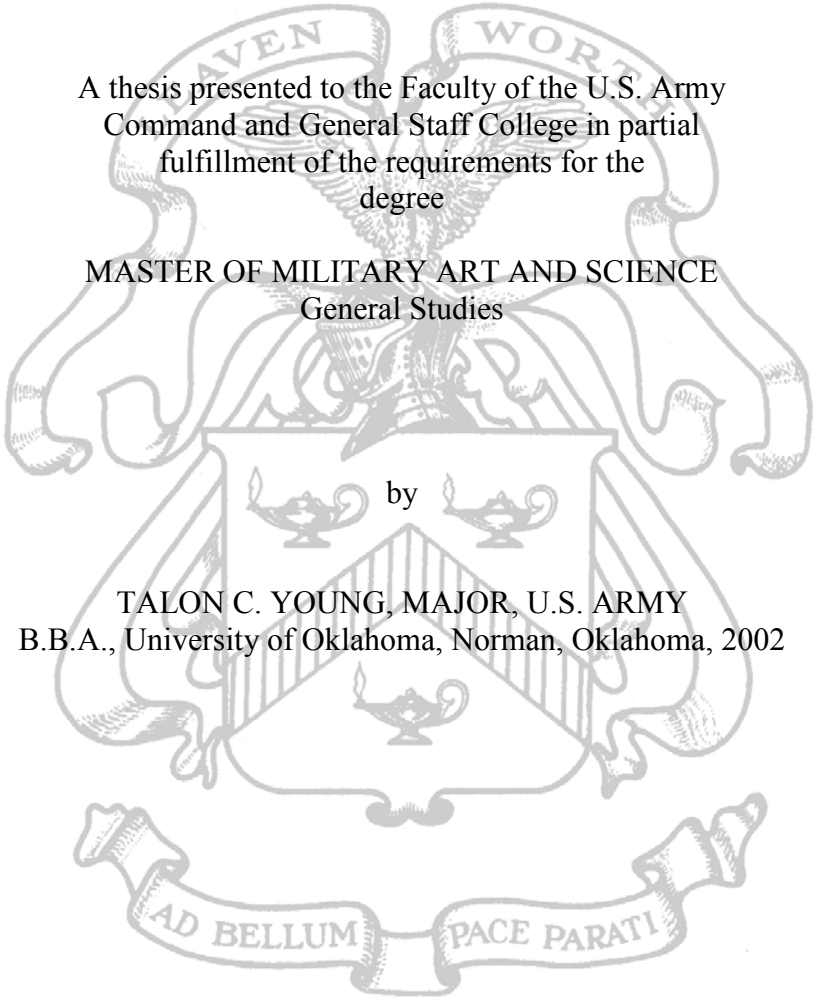

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This qualitative research case study attempted to address "How can the U.S. military degrade individual Salafist-jihadi groups without giving energy to the global Salafist-jihadi movement?" The secondary questions were: what gaps exist between the U.S. military's CT strategy and doctrine and the most current research and information, and why is the Salafist-jihadi movement gaining strength? To answer these questions, the study examined current U.S. military doctrine and strategies relating to combating the Salafist-jihadi threat and compared those documents to the most current academic research. After a comparison was made, the differences between the two were used to identify gaps between what the U.S. military believes, and what is actually true based on the research. The findings concluded that the U.S. military lacks a shared understanding of what terrorism is, how it differs at each level of war, what the center of gravity is, and how to counter it. Until a shared understanding is achieved, the U.S. military will continue to be slow to innovate and adapt against this particular threat.

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The opinions and conclusions expressed herein are those of the student author and do not necessarily represent the views of the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College or any other governmental agency. (References to this study should include the foregoing statement.)

ABSTRACT

IMPROVING THE U.S. MILITARY'S ADAPTABILITY AGAINST THE SALAFIST-JIHADI THREAT, by Major Talon C. Young, 96 pages.

This qualitative research case study attempted to address "How can the U.S. military degrade individual Salafist-jihadi groups without giving energy to the global Salafist-jihadi movement?" The secondary questions were: what gaps exist between the U.S. military's CT strategy and doctrine and the most current research and information, and why is the Salafist-jihadi movement gaining strength? To answer these questions, the study examined current U.S. military doctrine and strategies relating to combating the Salafist-jihadi threat and compared those documents to the most current academic research. After a comparison was made, the differences between the two were used to identify gaps between what the U.S. military believes, and what is actually true based on the research. The findings concluded that the U.S. military lacks a shared understanding of what terrorism is, how it differs at each level of war, what the center of gravity is, and how to counter it. Until a shared understanding is achieved, the U.S. military will continue to be slow to innovate and adapt against this particular threat.

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ACRONYMS

ADP	Army Doctrine Publication
ADRP	Army Doctrine Reference Publication
CINC	Commander in Chief, The President of the United States
COG	Center of Gravity
COIN	Counterinsurgency
CT	Counterterrorism
DOD	Department of Defense
DOS	Department of State
FM	Field Manual
FTO	Foreign Terrorist Organizations
GWOT	Global War on Terrorism
HN	Host Nation
IRTPA	Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham
JP	Joint Publication
LOE	Lines of Effort
LOO	Lines of Operation
MISO	Military Information Support Operations
NCTC	National Counterterrorism Center
RAND	Research and Development
TMT	Terror Management Theory
USG	United States Government
WMD	Weapons of Mass Destruction

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

> Now, make no mistake, our nation is still threatened by terrorists. But we have to recognize that the threat has shifted and evolved from the one that came to our shores on 9/11. With a decade of experience now to draw from, this is the moment to ask ourselves hard questions–about the nature of today's threats and how we should confront them.[1]
>
> — President Barack Obama, JP 3-26

"Without knowing what provides terrorism with a fertile ground to grow or what facilitates it and how, one will always stand on the brink of producing more terrorism while trying to crush it."[2] It is vital to understand and address the causes of terrorism before one can develop an effective counter-terrorism (CT) strategy. The U.S. is fighting a war against violent extremism, yet there is not a shared understanding about what is perpetuating the increase in terrorism and what measures are effective in fighting it.

Terrorism has many different causes, comes in many different forms, and can be employed by many different types of organizations, most of which are beyond the scope of this paper. This thesis will focus only on the Salafist-jihadi movement. This qualitative research case study will address whether the U.S. military's doctrine and strategies relating to fighting against the Salafist-jihadi movement are aligned with the latest academic research and information. The goal is to determine whether the commonly held beliefs that are driving the U.S. military's CT strategy against Salafist-jihadi groups are

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[1] Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Publication (JP) 3-26, *Counterterrorism* (Washington, DC: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2014), IV-1.

[2] Tore Bjorgo, ed., *Root Causes of Terrorism: Myths, Realities and the Way Forward* (Abingdon, UK: Taylor and Francis Group, 2005), 1.

valid. If invalid beliefs are identified, the secondary goal of this thesis is to give recommendations that will realign the U.S. military's CT doctrine and strategy with the most current information and research.

Background

> Following the devastating attacks of 9/11, the United States instinctively, and understandably, concentrated on firepower to prevent repeat attacks and to destroy those who could conduct them. But instinct is not strategy. Reliance on firepower has not enabled the United States to reverse the globalizing Salafist tide. Every use of force against Muslims, not to mention every misuse, is employed by the adversary to make the case to militants and prospective martyrs that their community needs them to fight and die.[3]

According to a report from the International Center for the Study of Radicalization and Political Violence, the month of November 2014 was the deadliest month in recent history for Salafist-jihadi attacks. "Less than four years ago jihadist violence was widely believed to be in a state of terminal decline. Osama bin Laden and his most senior lieutenants had been killed…by the end of 2014, it is no longer al Qaeda or jihadism that look outdated but the predictions of its imminent demise."[4] Despite the U.S. military spending the last thirteen years fighting a Global War on Terror, and despite numerous tactical and operational successes along the way, the U.S. military is still losing the strategic fight against this ideologically based enemy. "This shows that jihadism is a global movement, that global movements don't just disappear, and that ideas and

[3] David Gompert, *Heads We Win: The Cognitive Side of Counterinsurgency (COIN)* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2007), 36.

[4] Peter Neumann, *The New Jihadism a Global Snapshot* (London: ICSR, 2014), 7.

ideologies can not be eliminated through drone strikes–however effective those tactics may have been in decimating al Qaeda's leadership."[5]

A common CT tactic is to target the charismatic leaders that are inspiring a terrorist movement, but since these leaders typically operate in regions that do not complement U.S. intelligence collection capabilities, targeting these individuals can be a long process. Osama Bin Laden conducted an attack on the U.S. homeland in 2001, but it took the U.S. military until May 2nd, 2011 to find and kill him. Mullah Omar has led the Quetta based Taliban virtually uncontested by the U.S. military since its inception in the early 1990's. Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi has been a direct threat to the United States and allies since 2010, but the U.S. military has yet to locate and kill him. Although each of these individuals are valuable leaders within their organizations, it has proven difficult for the U.S. military to successfully target them in a timely manner.

Even when the U.S. military successfully decapitates a leader, research suggests that it will rarely lead to long-term gains.[6] By decapitating the leadership in many terrorist organizations, the U.S. military is doing more harm than good. "The findings show that decapitation is more likely to have counterproductive effects in larger, older, religious, and separatist organizations . . . Leadership decapitation seems to be a misguided strategy, particularly given the nature of organizations being currently targeted. The rise of religious and separatist organizations indicates that decapitation will

[5] Neumann, 23.

[6] Jenna Jordan, *When Heads Roll: Assessing the Effectiveness of Leadership Decapitation* (Abingdon, UK: Taylor and Francis Group, 2009), 719-755.

continue to be an ineffective means of reducing terrorist activity."[7] Although underground organizations are very dependent on charismatic leaders, especially in the early stages of their movements, the U.S. military's CT and counterinsurgency (COIN) doctrine fall short in explaining the positive and negative impacts of the decapitation approach.

There are appropriate situations when the decapitation approach and lethal targeting of leaders and support personnel have proven to be effective. However, there are several factors that need to be understood before lethal targeting occurs. Some of these factors are the type and size of the terrorist organization, whether it is religious or ideological in nature, and the age of the group itself.[8] It is important that the U.S. military's doctrine be updated to allow for a more complete understanding of the specific situations when the decapitation strategy can be the most effective and when it may be counterproductive.

Purpose

This thesis attempts to validate some of the commonly held beliefs that are used to create a shared understanding of the enemy that the U.S. military faces in combating violent extremist. The Salafist-jihadi movement is a complex problem that is not yet fully understood, even within the military and academic communities. "While academics have made great strides in disseminating the false perceptions that permeate the international

[7] Jordan, 754.

[8] Ibid.

debate, the true determinants of terrorism remain uncertain."[9] I have held some beliefs since the attacks of 9/11 that have shaped how I view the War on Terror. Some of these beliefs, such as that decapitating a terrorist leader will have a negative impact on his organization, can be found throughout U.S. military publications. They are then used to create the strategies that are employed at the tactical, operational, and strategic levels of war in the war against violent extremism. These beliefs, although true in certain situations, can not be universally applied to every situation. Presently, it appears that policy makers and DOD employees do not understand when and where they can be applied to produce the desired affects. Attempting to universally apply these beliefs ultimately creates a gap between what we believe, and what is actually true. To understand when and where they can be applied, this thesis will analyze the most current research on the subject.

As practioners of the U.S. military's CT strategy, we first need to seek a more holistic understanding of the problem. After developing an understanding of the problem, this study will determine whether there are any gaps between the U.S. military's doctrine and strategy and the most current information and research. Once gaps are identified, they will be analyzed to anticipate the results that those gaps will have on the U.S. military's operations in support of combating violent extremism. This thesis will then recommend changes to U.S. military doctrine and strategies that realign them with the most current research and information. The conclusions and recommendations of the study will focus on the complex problem that the U.S. military currently faces in how to

[9] Clare Richardson, *Relative Deprivation Theory in Terrorism: A Study of Higher Education and Unemployment as Predictors of Terrorism* (New York, NY: New York University, 2011), 5.

fight individual Salafist terrorist organizations throughout the world while not enabling the larger Salifi-jihadist movement.

Statement of Problem

The problem this qualitative research case study addressed is how the United States military can degrade individual Salafist-jihadi groups without strengthening the global Salafist-jihadi movement.

Significance of the Problem

To use an analogy from Greek mythology, the U.S. military's decapitation approach to CT has yielded similar results as Hercules cutting off a head of the hydra; two more heads grow in its place. In the years leading up to Bin Laden's death, one could argue that he had become increasingly isolated and less effective as the group's leader. However, after Osama Bin Laden was killed, his organization fragmented and gave rise to numerous new Salifi-jihadist organizations that actually strengthened the movement that Osama Bin Laden hoped to create. In an address to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in March of 2014, the Director of the National Counterterrorism Center stated:

> Core al Qaeda has adapted by becoming more decentralized and is shifting away from large-scale, mass casualty plots like the attacks of September 11th . . . ultimately, this less centralized network poses a more diverse and geographically dispersed threat and is likely to result in increased low-level attacks against U.S. and European interests overseas. Put simply, we are facing a wider array of threats in a greater variety of locations across the Middle East and around the world.[10]

[10] Matthew Olsen, *Extremism and Sectarianism in Syria, Iraq, and Lebanon, Hearing before the Senate Foreign Relations Committe*, 6 March 2014, 113th Cong., 2nd

Whether core al Qaeda is stronger or weaker since the death of Osama Bin Laden is debatable, but also somewhat irrelevant; the movement, not the organization, is the greater threat to the national interest of the United States. In 2014, the U.S. State Department had 59 groups on the Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTO) list; of those 59 groups, 38 were Salafist organizations.[11] As stated earlier, the month of November 2014 was the deadliest month for the Salafist movement in recent history. Taken together, this evidence shows that the Salafist movement is gaining strength across the globe. This poses the question as to how and why the Salafist-jihadi movement is gaining strength while the U.S. military has been waging a Global War on Terror for the past thirteen years.

When Osama Bin Laden and many other terrorist leaders are killed, although their organizations sometime fracture, the Salafist-jihadi ideology that they promote actually gains strength. This ideology thrives on the message that the West is not waging a War on Terror, but instead is waging a War on Islam. Targeting the leaders of terrorist organizations, although effective at the tactical level of war, can actually strengthen the enemy's message and can sometimes do more harm than good. Thus, as we have observed over the past thirteen years, tactical and operational victories can actually lead to the U.S. military losing ground at the strategic level.

Many, including myself, believed that a charismatic leader, such as Osama Bin Laden, was the center of gravity (COG) for his organization. Although this COG analysis

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sess, accessed 6 January 2015, http://www.nctc.gov/docs/20140306_SFR_ ExtremismSectarianism_Syria_Iraq_Lebanon.pdf.

[11] U.S. Department of State, "Foreign Terrorist Organizations," Bureau of Counterterrorism, accessed 20 April 2015, www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/other/des/123085.htm.

may have been correct at one time in his organization's life cycle, the problem was much more complex. As his organization grew and subordinate leaders started to emerge, his importance as the group's leader diminished. Furthermore, the Salafist-jihadi movement is composed of at least 60 smaller terrorist organizations, and decapitating the leader of one organization can actually strengthen the Salafist-jihadi movement as whole. As pictures of U.S. operations get front page attention, similar terrorist organizations across the globe will experience a spike in recruitment and funding as their message of the West's War on Islam gains strength and credibility.

Since 9/11, much of the U.S. military's doctrine has not adapted by incorporating the lessons learned from the past thirteen years of fighting against the global Salafist-jihadi insurgency and terrorist movement. "The jihad is able to perpetuate itself by relying on perceived Western injustice and aggression to turn disgruntled Muslims into radical Islamists and then using the story of the West's assault on Islam to recruit radicalized individuals to violence and martyrdom. Understanding this cognitive process is the first step toward breaking it."[12] Although research has been conducted on the subject, the U.S. military has been slow in adapting its strategies and doctrine.

Research Questions

A qualitative research case study was conducted that was designed to answer the following primary research question:

1. How can the U.S. military degrade individual Salafist-jihadi groups without giving energy to the global Salafist-jihadi movement?

[12] Gompert, 11.

Secondary research questions are:

1. What gaps exist between the U.S. military's CT strategy and doctrine and the most current research and information?
2. Why is the Salafist-jihadi movement gaining strength?

Methodology

This research study used a qualitative case study methodology. The primary method of data collection for this case study was reviewing and analyzing documents. The researcher reviewed the available documents on the U.S. military's doctrine and strategy relating to CT/COIN and then compared the themes found within those documents to the relevant academic research. After the comparison was made, the researcher was able to identify gaps within U.S. military doctrine and strategies where the two did not align with the academic research. The purpose of this qualitative research case study was to determine how the U.S. military could combat Salafist-jihadi groups without having the adverse affect of strengthening the global Salafist-jihadi movement.

Assumptions

This thesis addressed the following assumptions:

1. Clearly defined potential enemies guide a military's innovation within an interwar period. As the U.S. military withdraws from Afghanistan and Iraq, innovation in terms of force structure, capabilities, weapons, personnel, and training will be centered on the potential enemies that the United States military will be employed against in the future. To innovate effectively, a military needs to understand the enemy that it faces.

2. The practitioners of CT and COIN are familiar with the doctrine, capabilities, and employment of supporting operations including Information Operations (IO), Military Information Support Operations (MISO), and Cyberspace Operations.
3. The global Salafist-jihadi movement is complex and evolving and is not clearly understood.

Limitations

This qualitative research case study will be conducted at the unclassified level. It will not include analysis of any classified doctrine or strategies that the U.S. military may be employing. The following limitations also apply to this research:

1. The research focused on documents and how they related and applied to Salafist-jihadi organizations. This research may not apply to other types of terrorist organizations, revolutions, and mass movements.
2. This qualitative research case study was not able to focus on either terrorism, counterterrorism, insurgency, or counterinsurgency. Although there is a substantial difference between these terms, the research wasn't limited to any category because the Salifi-jihadi movement blurs the lines between them.

Definitions of Key Terms

Apostate: people who are 'pretending' to be Muslims without adhering to the faith's core principles and who therefore constitute legitimate targets.[13]

[13] Neumann, 18.

Charismatic leadership: These leaders are seen as visionaries who demonstrate some combination of emotionality; activity; sensitivity to the sociopolitical landscape; interest in and empathy toward their followers; superior rhetorical and persuasive skills; and exemplary behavior in the form of sacrificing their personal ambitions for those of the movement.[14]

Combatant Commander: A commander of one of the unified or specified combatant commands established by the President.[15]

Counterinsurgency (COIN): a comprehensive civilian and military effort designed to simultaneously defeat and contain insurgency and address its root causes.[16]

Counterterrorism (CT): actions and activities to neutralize terrorists, their organizations, and networks in order to render them incapable of using violence to instill fear and coerce governments or societies to achieve their goals.[17]

Doctrine: Operations are doctrine based. Doctrine standardizes fundamental principles, tactics, techniques, procedures, and terms and symbols throughout an organization. Doctrine forms the basis for training. It applies to all operations, describing

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[14] Jay Conger, "Toward a Behavioral Taxonomy of Charismatic Leadership in Organizational Settings," *The Academy of Management Review* 12 (1987): 637-647.

[15] Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Publication (JP) 1-02, *Dictionary of Military and Associate Terms* (Washington, DC: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2010), 53.

[16] Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Publication (JP) 3-24, *Counterinsurgency* (Washington, DC: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2013), I-2.

[17] Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Publication (JP) 3-26, *Counterterrorism,* I-5.

how (not what) to think about operations and what to train. It provides an authoritative guide for leaders and Soldiers, while allowing freedom to adapt to circumstances.[18]

Doctrinal Template: A model based on known or postulated adversary doctrine. Doctrinal templates illustrate the disposition and activity of adversary forces and assets conducting a particular operation unconstrained by the effects of the battlespace. They represent the application of adversary doctrine under ideal conditions.[19]

Globalization: a process of interaction and integration among the people, companies, and governments of different nations, a process driven by international trade and investment and aided by information technology.[20]

Insurgency: a struggle for some form of political power, whether that power is sought through reform, revolution, secession, nullification, or resistance.[21]

Insurgent Narrative: a tool used by insurgents to shape how the population perceives circumstances and events. Used to link conditions-based grievances to the nature or behavior of the incumbent regime and articulate an alternative political vision that will address those grievances.

Motivational Causes of Terrorism: these are found to be the causes that motivate people to act due to the grievances that they have at the individual or societal level.

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[18] Department of the Army, TRADOC Reg 25-26, *Preparing and Publishing U.S. Army TRADOC Publications Program* (Fort Monroe, VA: TRADOC, 2008), 6.

[19] Headquarters Department of the Army, Field Manual (FM) 1-02, *Terms and Military Symbols* (Washington, DC: Headquarters Department of the Army, 2004), 1-65.

[20] Globalization 101, "What is Globalization," accessed 12 April 2015, www.globalization101.org/what-is-globalization.

[21] Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Publication (JP) 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*, I-3.

Psychological causes, ideological causes and feelings of revenge can be counted among these causes.[22]

Operational Level of War: The level of war at which campaigns and major operations are planned, conducted, and sustained to achieve strategic objectives within theaters or other operational areas.[23]

Salafist-jihadi Group: a terrorist group that emphasizes the importance of returning to a "pure" Islam, that of the Salaf, the pious ancestors; and believes that violent jihad is fard 'ayn (a personal religious duty).[24]

Strategic Level of War: The level of war at which a nation, often as a member of a group of nations, determines national or multinational (alliance or coalition) strategic security objectives and guidance, then develops and uses national resources to achieve those objectives.[25]

Strategic Plan: A plan for the overall conduct of a war.[26]

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[22] Zeynep Sutalan, *The Causes of Terrorism, Organizational and Psychological Aspects of Terrorism* (Washington, DC: IOS Press, 2008), 8.

[23] Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Publication (JP) 1-02*, Dictionary of Military and Associate Terms,* 238.

[24] Seth Jones, *A Persistent Threat: The Evolution of Salfi and other Jihad Movements* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2014), 2.

[25] Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Publication (JP) 1-02*, Dictionary of Military and Associate Terms,* 307.

[26] Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Publication (JP) 5-0*, Joint Operation Planning* (Washington, DC: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2011), GL-16.

Strategy: A prudent idea or set of ideas for employing the instruments of national power in a synchronized and integrated fashion to achieve theater, national, and/or multinational objectives.[27]

Tactical Level of War: The level of war at which battles and engagements are planned and executed to achieve military objectives assigned to tactical units or task forces.[28]

Targeting: The process of selecting and prioritizing targets and matching the appropriate response to them, considering operational requirements and capabilities.[29]

Terrorism: the unlawful use of violence or threat of violence, often motivated by religious, political, or other ideological beliefs, to instill fear and coerce governments or societies in pursuit of goals that are usually political.[30]

Terrorist psycho-logic: Terrorists are driven to commit acts of violence as a consequence of psychological forces, and their special psycho-logic is constructed to rationalize acts they are psychological compelled to commit.[31]

Unified Action: The synchronization, coordination, and/or integration of the activities of governmental and nongovernmental entities with military operations to achieve unity of effort.[32]

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[27] Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Publication (JP) 1-02, *Dictionary of Military and Associate Terms*, 307.

[28] Ibid., 317.

[29] Ibid., 319.

[30] Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Publication (JP) 3-26, *Counterterrorism*, I-5.

[31] Jerrold Post, *Terrorist Psycho-Logic: Terrorist Behavior as a Product of Psychological Forces* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 28.

USG COIN strategy: based on supporting the HN COIN strategy. It is designed to simultaneously protect the population from insurgent violence; strengthen the legitimacy and capacity of the HN government; and isolate the insurgents physically, psychologically, politically, socially, and economically.[33]

Summary

This study focuses on the primary research question of how the U.S. military can degrade Salafist-jihadi organizations without giving energy to the global Salafist-jihadi movement. To answer this question, this thesis examines the gaps that exist between U.S. military CT doctrine and strategy and the relevant research and information on the Salafist-jihadi movement. It then determines why the gap exist and what effect the gap is having on the U.S. military's operations in support of combating violent extremism. After understanding the gaps in what the U.S. military is doing and what the research concludes that it should be doing, this will aid in an understanding of why the Salafist-jihadi movement is still gaining strength after thirteen years of fighting. This thesis will utilize a five chapter format: introduction, literature review, research methodology, findings, and conclusions and recommendations. The literature review in Chapter 2 will describe the Salafist-jihadi movement and ideology, motivational causes of individuals joining Salafist-jihadi groups, the Center of Gravity (COG) of individual groups compared to that of the movement, and U.S. military CT/COIN strategies and doctrine.

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[32] Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Publication (JP) 1-02, *Dictionary of Military and Associate Terms*, 338.

[33] Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Publication (JP) 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*, I-3.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

> Our enemy has made similar mistakes. He did not recognize that fighting against the Red Army required a different strategy and different tactics from those used in fighting other forces. Relying on his superiority in various respects, he took us lightly and stuck to his old methods of warfare.[34]
>
> — Mao Tse-Tung, Mao's Selected Works

Introduction

The purpose of the literature review is to understand what research has already been conducted on the topic and to allow the reader to become familiar with the topic. This chapter has four subchapters: (1) a description of the Salafist-jihadi movement (2) motivational causes of Salafist-jihadi organizations (3) a Center of Gravity Analysis–Salafist-jihadi Groups vs. the Movement (4) and U.S. military CT/COIN strategies and doctrine.

A Description of the Salafist-jihadi Movement

The Salafist-jihadi movement is ideologically driven and aims to create a Sunni Caliphate. There are currently 60 recognized terrorist groups that compose the movement, all with varying degrees of allegiance to al Qaida Core.[35] The majority of these groups view America, or more broadly the West, as their enemy and believe that it

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[34] Mao Tse-tung, *Problems of Strategy in China's Revolutionary War* (Peking, China: Foreign Languages Press, 1936), accessed 25 March 2015, https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-1/mswv1_12.htm.

[35] Jones, Appredix A.

is their individual duty to perform jihad.[36] Many of these groups also have drastically different interest and objectives which only align in two areas. These two common areas form the criteria that this thesis uses to define a Salafist-jihadi group. A recent RAND study defines these two criteria as "First, the group emphasizes the importance of returning to a "pure" Islam, that of the Salaf, the pious ancestors. Second, the group believes that violent jihad is fard 'ayn (a personal religious duty)."[37]

At the tactical level, many of the Salafist-jihadi groups look more like insurgent organizations who employ terrorist tactics than they do terrorist. At the strategic level, there is value in viewing the Salafist-jihadi movement as an insurgency. Another RAND study entitled *The Cognitive Side of Counterinsurgency* says "The foremost example of a global insurgency, if not the first full-fledged case, is the Islamist-Sunni-Salafist jihad that range from Southeast Asia to northwest Iraq to northern Africa to central London." [38] Viewing the Salafist-jihadi movement as a global insurgency allows for a better understanding of their medium and long-term objectives.

Their long-term objective is to return to a state of "pure" Islam and establish a Muslim Caliphate. Although some groups see this objective as more regional than others, they all have this as their predominant long-term objective. To accomplish this objective, they believe conducting a violent uprising is a necessary first step in delegitimizing the government. JP 3-24 (COIN) states that a massive violence campaign can: "(1) Weaken popular support for the government, which has failed to protect the people (2) Make the

[36] Jones, 2.

[37] Ibid.

[38] Gompert, 4.

population susceptible to insurgent intimidation."[39] Because U.S. military doctrine doesn't describe terrorist campaigns or organizations, it is necessary to use an insurgency model in this thesis. By using an insurgency model to understand these organizations and their medium term goals, it allows for a better visualization of how the Salafist-jihadi intend to accomplish their long objective of creating a Muslim Caliphate.

Strengths of the Salafist Movement

The Salafist-jihadist movement has many strengths which make it a serious threat to many countries throughout the world. The primary strengths that will be addressed in this section are derived from conducting a comparison between the group's capabilities and the capabilities of the U.S. military. The groups' strengths are categorized into the following: command structure, message and ideology, strategic diversification, and medium term objectives.

Since 9/11, due to CT operations and internal differences among the jihadi groups themselves, Salafist-jihadi groups have transitioned from a hierarchical command structure to a decentralized command structure.[40] This decentralized structure has disadvantages that will be discussed in the next section, but it also gives the groups and movement some advantages. The primary advantage of decentralization is that the groups, and the ideology that they promote, are far less susceptible to a decapitation approach. Although the U.S. military's intelligence and force projection capabilities enable the targeting of these key leaders, even when successful targeting occurs, it is less

[39] Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Publication (JP) 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*, 4-7.

[40] Jones, 20.

effective against decentralized command structures. This has caused Salafist-jihadi groups to structure themselves in a way that minimizes the U.S. military's greatest strength.

There is evidence that indicates that targeting these leaders can increase the resiliency of the groups, partly by validating their message of the West's War on Islam[41]. This message, and the Salafist-jihadi ideology that unites Sunni extremist in an effort to establish a Muslim Caliphate, combine to form another major strength. A RAND study entitled "The Cognitive Side of Counterinsurgency" describes this message and the ideology that drives it as the source of energy of the Salafist-jihadi movement:

> Leaders of the global jihad are charismatic and gifted at strategy and unifying ideology. They skillfully convey a story of relentless American-Christian-Zionist attacks on the global Muslim community (or ummah) and Islamic faith, with the violent occupation of Iraq offered as the latest proof. From this comes the call to jihad and martyrdom in 'defense' of Islam, which, given the superior military power of the "Crusaders", must include terrorist counterattacks in the West. The ability to tell and sell this story is the energy source of the global Salafist insurgency.[42]

This same RAND study also states that "For the global Salafist insurgency, this 'source of energy' is the ability to create, sustain, and channel intense *individual* motivation."[43] As highlighted earlier, the reason this movement has gained strength so quickly is that the message and ideology is spread by charismatic figures who are taking words and phrases from the Koran and Hadiths and inspiring individuals to act on their personal 'obligation' to engage in jihad. A strength of this message and ideology is that it

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[41] Gompert, 46.

[42] Ibid., 11.

[43] Ibid., 38.

is able to take root in economically challenged areas because charismatic leaders are able to find a common grievance within the population.[44] This is especially true in rural areas where the population is inherently less reliant on the government for security and assistance.

The third strength of the Salafist-jihadi movement is the strategic diversification of its message and ideology. Although this has happened by accident due to the fracturing of many of the groups and internal conflicts, this diversification is to their advantage. Just like in business, strategic diversification creates advantages that maximize growth and minimize risks. Because the groups are diversified, a potential recruit that holds personal beliefs that do not align with the message and ideology of the Islamic State may, for example, find that the message and ideology of al Qaida is more in line with their personal beliefs. On the same note, an act such as the burning of the Jordanian pilot or the mass murders of fellow Muslims, which may lessen the support for the group conducting the executions, will have little negative impact on the Salafist-jihadi movement as a whole.

Lastly, possibly the greatest strength of Salafist-jihadi groups can be found within their medium-term objectives. As highlighted earlier, the objectives when conducting an insurgency are to weaken the government and make the populace susceptible to intimidation. Once these objectives are met, the group has delegitimized the government to a point that will allow them to install their own Islamic government that operates under sharia law.

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[44] Nathan Bos, *Human Factors Considerations of Undergrounds in Insurgencies* (Fort Bragg, NC: U.S. Army Special Operations Command, 2013), 115.

When compared to the capabilities of the host nation government and the U.S. military, a group that intends to accomplish these mid-term objectives is postured in a position of advantage from the start. Put simply, it is cheaper and faster to destroy than to build, it is cheaper and faster to delegitimize than to legitimize, and it is cheaper and faster to kill innocents than to protect. Therefore, the U.S. military and the host nation is at a position of disadvantage from the beginning. CT and COIN operations cost far more than the tactics that they attempt to prevent. A counterinsurgent may build a bridge that cost $500,000 and takes weeks to complete; the next day, an insurgent may destroy it with $500 worth of explosives. Herein lies the Salafi-jihadist's greatest tactical strength. They can easily create chaos and destruction nearly anywhere in the world, almost regardless of the blood and treasure that is spent in trying to stop them at the point of attack.

Weaknesses of the Salafist-Jihadi Movement

Although their message and ideology is a strength, it is not without fault. *The Cognitive Side of COIN* says "where the jihadist argument is weakest is in its theological justification for killing innocents, killing Muslims, and suicide. Provided it is challenged by respected Islamic scholars, as opposed to Western politicians, this weakness can be exploited to undermine potential Muslim public support for jihadists, impede recruitment of new jihadist, and dissuade suicide terror."[45] The theological opposition for killing innocents, Muslims, and for persuading Muslims to commit suicide creates a divide between many of the groups. For example, the Islamic State has videotaped barbaric

[45] Gompert, 11.

executions that are not customary to the Muslim community such as burning a Jordanian pilot to death. Executions such as this creates a divide between the Islamic State and other Salafist-jihadi groups, along with the rest of the Muslim community. This is an example where within the strengths of particular Salafist-jihadi groups also are sewn the seeds of its own destruction. Creating the chaos, destruction, and fear necessary to intimidate a populace can also cause the group to lose legitimacy and support. However, as stated earlier, although the individual group will be degraded, the actions of an individual group will have little negative impact on the movement.

The decentralization of Salafist-jihadi groups create a tactical advantage for them, but it also creates strategic vulnerabilities. Seth Jones in *The Theory and Conduct of Insurgency* gives data compiled from 180 different insurgencies since World War II, specifically focusing on the degree of centralization among the different groups.[46] His findings concluded that "Groups with high levels of centralization have been more likely to achieve victory (41.5 percent) than ones with moderate levels (31.4 percent) or low levels (17.4 percent) of centralization."[47] From a probability standpoint, forcing insurgent organizations to decentralize gives them a lower chance of success. The question is whether this historical data on insurgencies can accurately predict the probabilities relating to the global Salafi-jihadist terrorist movement; or is this data more relevant to predicting the likelihood of success of only the individual Salafist-jihadi groups?

[46] Jones, 23.

[47] Ibid.

Motivational Causes of Salafist-jihadi Organizations

The motivational causes of terrorism need to be understood in the context of the fundamental human and psychological defense mechanisms that individuals, societies, and cultures have created to protect the psyche. "Perhaps the most glaring misconception about terrorism is the assumption that terrorists are underprivileged, uneducated individuals on the fringe of society. Increasingly, empirical studies of terrorism have demonstrated that such a notion is flawed. Not only is there no empirical basis for this perception, but terrorism also appears to be more of a desirable undertaking than a last resort for many individuals."[48] After discussing the fundamental human psyche considerations, I will then transition to external and environmental factors that are contributing to the motivational causes of terrorism.

The Awareness of Death–Terror Management Theory (TMT)

In the context of TMT, the word "terror" is synonymous with "anxiety." The theory states that "to combat awareness of their transient existence, humankind (a) developed cultural worldviews that imbue the world with meaning, order, permanence, and standards for valued behavior and (b) strive to achieve a personal sense of value within these systems by living up to the standards of value that they proscribe."[49] As a means of coping with the awareness of death, societies and cultures created defense mechanisms which could minimize the anxiety of death.

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[48] Richardson, 3.

[49] Kenneth Vail, "Dying to Live: Terrorism, War, and Defending One's Way of Life," in *Interdisciplinary Analysis of Terrorism and Political Aggression*, ed, Martin Ramirez (Newcastle, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007), 64.

To minimize the anxiety that an individual may have about their own mortality, the individual or culture may hold beliefs that enable them to have a future that endures past that of their human existence. Religious beliefs in an afterlife or an individual's drive to be immortalized within their society after death are examples of coping mechanisms used to deal with the awareness of mortality. "From the perspective of the TMT framework, the deadly plagues of war and global terrorism are rooted in the human need to maintain the integrity and dignity of one's culture."[50] These coping mechanisms are usually benign until two or more cultures with contrasting beliefs begin interfering (either intentionally or unintentionally) with one another.[51]

The Effect of Globalization on the Relative Deprivation Theory

Globalization, through an increase in information technology, is creating an environment where poor cultures are being bombarded with images of opposing cultures that are prospering. These images create a gap between what the individual possesses (material goods, employment opportunities, etc.) and what they believe that they are expected or entitled to posses. This gap eventually creates feelings of humiliation and injustice within those individuals or cultures and sows the seeds of rebellion, terrorism, insurgencies, etc.[52]

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[50] Vail, 64.

[51] Ibid., 51.

[52] Jeff Victoroff, "The Mind of a Terrorist: A Review and Critique of Psychological Approaches," *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 49, no. 1 (2005): 19, accessed 23 April 2015, http://www.jstor.org/stable/30045097.

In the social science discipline, this is known as the relative deprivation theory. "Relative deprivation theory holds that instead of an absolute standard of deprivations, a gap between expected and achieved welfare leads men to political violence."[53] The unequal distribution of economic goods is fairly easy to see and understand. Thinking specifically about the image that the United States holds on the world stage, most view the United States as a military superpower and somewhat hegemonic with foreign affairs. This in itself creates a perception in some cultures throughout the world that the United States is oppressive and has an unfair distribution of power. But Robert Woltering, after he conducted an exhaustive study regarding the image that the 'West' holds in Egyptian society, points out that "a more important difference concerns what I would call 'soft power' in the cultural realm. Daily life in Egypt is more touched by Western cultural products and behavioral norms than can be said conversely of the average Western environment and the cultural colorations of its daily life by Egyptian, Arabian, Muslim or "Eastern actors."[54]

The example that Robbert Woltering uses from his time studying Egypt is the presence of beer and alcohol billboards that can be seen near the highways in Cairo. This is a daily reminder to many Muslims that the West is encroaching on their culture. As the authors of *Dying to Live; Terrorism, War, and Defending One's Way of Life* point out "When one's cultural worldview is juxtaposed with other beliefs and customs, the potential for doubt is raised about the validity of one's own cultural worldview. People

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[53] Richardson, 1.

[54] Robbert Woltering, *Occidentalisms in the Arab World: Ideology and Images of the West in the Egyptian Media* (New York, NY: I. B. Tauris and Co., 2011), 147.

are thus inclined to symbolically defend their way of life in various way . . . seen in this light, increasing globalization and intercultural contact poses a threat to the security people feel in their own worldviews."[55]

Globalization is not just increasing doubt in an individual's worldviews and belief systems; it is also increasing the perceived differences in the prosperity of different cultures. Clare Richardson in her study on relative deprivation theory highlights that "globalization may be tied closely to relative deprivation, in the sense that greater access to information about people in other countries increases awareness of one's relative standing in the world."[56] Globalization has numerous affects on nearly every culture across the world that are tied to the relative deprivation theory. These affects can be expected to continue to sew the seeds of war and conflict across the globe.

Humiliation, Oppression, Occupation, and/or Injustice

> Mass movements can rise without belief in a God, but never without belief in a devil. Usually the strength of a mass movement is proportionate to the vividness and tangibility of its devil. When Hitler was asked whether he thought the Jew must be destroyed, he answered: "No . . . We should have then to invent him. It is essential to have a tangible enemy, not merely an abstract one.[57]

The first step in creating change, at least at the organizational level, is to create a sense of urgency among a population.[58] One of the most effective ways for Salafist-jihadi

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[55] Vail, 52.

[56] Richardson, 9.

[57] Eric Hoffer, *The True Believer: Thoughts on the Nature of Mass Movements* (New York, NY: Harper Collins Publishing, 2010), 65.

[58] John Kotter, *Leading Change* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Business Review Press, 2012), 35-67.

groups to create that sense of urgency is through a message of humiliation and oppression by an 'aggressor'. Robert Woltering's study on Egyptian citizens' view of the West concludes that "Islamist authors and outlets overwhelmingly convey the image of the West as essentially aggressive and naturally anti-Islamic. It is not difficult to see how this mirage of a Western menace to Islam is useful to try and scare a Muslim population into a loyal, unquestioning Islamic unity." Through their message that conveys this image of the West's War on Islam, these Salifi-jihadist groups are creating a sense of urgency that is necessary for their group's success.

The authors of *Dying to Live: Terrorism, War, and Defending One's Way of Life* conclude that:

> Organizations and networks like al Qaeda and the International Islamic Front represent a response to pervasive feelings of humiliation in the Islamic community. Many Muslims around the world have felt a long-standing collective humiliation in the face of Western and Israeli encroachment of Islamic holy territory . . . According to Mark Juegensmeyer (2000), part of the allure of violent retribution is that it "dehumiliates" a disgraced community by staking claim to a moral high ground (by fighting for 'good') and regaining a lost sense of respect.[59]

Even when there is little or no factual basis for the image of "the West as essentially aggressive and naturally anti-Islamic", many times, that message still has the intended effect on the population. For example, in Egypt, the United States' intervention in the Bosnia crisis in early 1990s is viewed as yet another Western attack on Muslims. Egyptians commonly believe that the United States was actually supporting the Serbian aggressors.[60] As Robert Woltering points out, "while it may be understandable that the American or Anglo-American invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan are perceived by many

[59] Vail, 56.

[60] Woltering, 139.

as ‘Western’ attacks upon ‘Islam’ . . . this perception of reality can only be understood in the light of the wider ideology that dictates that the West hates Islam, Islam is in danger, Muslims are suffering.”[61]

Whether the motivations of the terrorist organization is religious or ideological, an overreaction by a government can be the necessary spark that creates the ‘sense of urgency’ that a group needs to legitimize a message of oppression or injustice. There have been numerous examples of a government’s overreaction throughout history that have sewn the seeds for an insurgency. *Dying to Live* states:

> In 1916 the Irish Republican Army (IRA) staged the Easter Rising as a protest against British rule but received only lackluster support from the Irish public. When the British responded in a violent fashion, the Irish public united behind the IRA, providing a steady stream of troops, supplies and bloodshed. Likewise, when the Sri Lankan government enacted a series of brutal and oppressive domestic policies against the Tamil population, the Tamils nearly unanimously rallied behind the Tamil Tigers or LTTE in response. Similarly, it has been argued that the 9/11 terrorist attacks were planned with the intent of eliciting extreme retaliation from the United States, thereby uniting the Muslim community behind al Qaeda.[62]

A Center of Gravity Analysis–Salafist-jihadi Groups vs. the Movement

For the purpose of this thesis, the term ‘source of energy’ is synonymous with Center of Gravity (COG). Although identifying the COG is important, it is rarely a simple thing to do; this gives way to drastically different opinions and beliefs of what the COG is and where/how to defeat it. Many experts agree that the COG of a terrorist organization differs at each of the three levels of war–strategic, operational, and

[61] Woltering, 139.

[62] Vail, 50.

tactical.[63] However, this is where much of the expert consensus and doctrine on identifying enemy COGs, especially in irregular warfare, stops.

Dr. Milan Vego in *Addressing the Fog of COG* said that the "destruction of a center of gravity will have a decisive affect on a belligerent's ability to achieve an objective and that an effective plan therefore relies on the proper determination of the friendly and enemy centers of gravity."[64] When conducting CT and COIN operations, a proper COG analysis is crucial. Clausewitz described it as "the hub of all power and movement, on which everything depends . . . the point at which all our energies should be directed."[65] JP 3-26, *Counterterrorism*, says that "The Joint Force Commander's (JFC) analysis of COGs at all levels is important because it guides the application of military capabilities . . . a JFC should focus efforts against critical vulnerabilities that will do the most decisive or significant damage to a terrorist's COG."[66] With the importance of a COG analysis in mind, we must first understand the difference between the groups and the movement.

JP 3-26, *Counterterrorism*, gives the examples of either key leaders or a permissive operating environment being the operational level COGs of a terrorist organization, but gives no insight into potential tactical or strategic level COGs when

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[63] Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Publication (JP) 5-0, *Joint Operation Planning*, III-23.

[64] Jonathan Klug, "Behind the Mosaic: Insurgent Centers of Gravity and Counterinsurgency," in *Addressing the FOG of COG*, ed. Celestino Perez (Fort Leavenworth, KS:Combat Studies Institute Press, 2012), 5.

[65] Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War* ed. and trans. Howard and Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), 595-596.

[66] Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Publication (JP) 3-26*, Counterterrorism,* IV-9.

conducting CT operations.[67] After conducting COG related research on insurgencies, Dr. Vego concludes, "Insurgent commanders and forces will often be tactical centers of gravity, although if these forces concentrate they could be an operational center of gravity."[68] Because it is sometimes difficult to draw a line between the different levels of war, research and doctrine is suggesting that key leaders and commanders can be either tactical or operational level COGs, but rarely strategic level COGs. According to Dr. Vego, "the strategic objective is predominantly nonmilitary and is often ideological in nature."[69] A recent RAND study regarding the global Salafist insurgency found that the Salafist's source of energy "is the ability to create, sustain, and channel intense individual motivation."[70] This again would point toward the ideology being the strategic center of gravity for the Salafist-jihadi movement; sense the ideology is also what creates, sustains, and channels that intense individual motivations within the groups, it may also be the strategic level COG a particular group.

Dr. Antulio Echevarria, in his analysis on Clausewitz's COG concept, states, "centers of gravity are more than critical capabilities . . . [Which] if attacked . . . bring about the complete collapse of an opponent."[71] Dr. Echevarria also concludes that "al Qaeda's strategic center of gravity may be its ideology."[72] Jonathan Klug, in *Addressing*

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[67] Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Publication (JP) 3-26, *Counterterrorism,* IV-10.

[68] Klug, 6.

[69] Ibid.

[70] Gompert, 38.

[71] Klug, 8.

[72] Ibid., 20.

the Fog of COG, sums it up by saying, "if a strategic center of gravity falls, the enemy should collapse at that level of war."[73] This may explain why killing Osama Bin Laden actually strengthened the movement that he helped to start. Osama Bin Laden at the time of his death, although he was a charismatic leader that wielded great influence within the movement, was not al-Qaida's COG nor the COG of the Salafist-jihadi movement.

According to Stephen L. Melton in his article, *Center of Gravity Analysis –the Black Hole of Army Doctrine*:

> War on Terror: No identifiable COG in this Islamist attack on American global hegemony . . . The United States conducts a global campaign against terrorist leadership—using predator drone attacks, Special Forces raids, and other measures—to keep the terrorist cells off balance. Evidence suggest that the Islamic terrorist networks view their Islamic identity and anti-Western attitude as their COGs, but no evidence exists that the terrorists have a cogent formulation of American strategic and operational COGs.[74]

However, there are significant differences in opinion on this subject. JP 5-0 states that in "an irregular warfare environment, the enemy and friendly COG will most likely be the same population."[75] Dr. Joe Strange, a professor at the USMC War College, has an opposing view and says that the "support of the population is very important in most cases, but it is definitionally and methodologically inconsistent to refer to the population as the center of gravity."[76] Jonathan Klug, an author on Insurgent Centers of Gravity,

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[73] Klug, 19.

[74] Stephen Melton, "Center of Gravity Analysis–the Black Hole of Army Doctrine," in *Addressing the FOG of COG*, ed. Celestino Perez, 81-100 (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press), 90.

[75] Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Publication (JP) 5-0, *Joint Operation Planning*, III-22.

[76] Joe Strange, *Centers of Gravity and Critical Vulnerabilities: Perspectives on Warfighting No. 4* (Quantico, VA: Marine Corps University, 1997), 43-45.

says, “The population is not a center of gravity at any level of war by definition and by Strange’s methodology. More specifically, the population cannot be the insurgent center of gravity using Echevarria’s interpretation of Clausewitz, nor is the population a center of gravity using Strange’s methodology . . . in fact, if counterinsurgents treat the population as a center of gravity, it is very likely that they will waste resources and, worst case, the insurgents will win.”[77]

A common misconception when talking about the COG in insurgencies is derived from the idea that ‘the population is the prize’; some then take this to mean that the population must also then be the center of gravity. According to David Kilcullen, “the center of gravity of an insurgent movement–the source of power from which it derives its morale, its physical strength, its freedom of action, and its will to act–is its connectivity with the local population in a given area.”[78] This definition, or definitions similar to this, are sometimes oversimplified into the belief that the population is the COG. But, when you read Kilcullen’s words carefully, he’s actually saying that the COG of an insurgency is what ‘connects’ the insurgent movement with the local population in a given area. Much like the RAND study mentioned earlier, the Salafist’s source of energy “is its ability to create, sustain, and channel intense individual motivation.”[79] What is ‘connecting’ the insurgents to the local population and what is creating, sustaining, and channeling intense individual motivation? The ideology.

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[77] Klug, 11.

[78] David Kilcullen, *Counterinsurgency* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 7.

[79] Gompert, 38.

The disagreement continues when proposing ideology as the COG. For example, COL (Ret) Dale C. Eikmeier advocates eliminating things such as morale and ideology as potential enemy COGs during analysis because they are difficult to target and intangible.[80] "For example, an idea is intangible; however it resides in tangibles such as a mind, a book, or other type of physical media that is targetable. Morale resides in individuals and organizations; it does not exist in a targetable sense on its own. However, an individual or organization can be a target of attacks designed to affect morale."[81] He recommends that intangibles such as ideology be categorized under critical capabilities, critical requirements, or critical vulnerabilities but not as the COG itself.[82]

COL (Ret) Eikmeier also proposes a new doctrinal definition for COG. In his words, "the intent of the proposed definition is to limit COGs to tangible agents that have a physical existence. The reason is simple; we can more easily target things for defense or attack that physically exist."[83] However, the purpose of a COG analysis is to identify the enemy's COG, not to identify a COG that is easily targetable. The U.S. military current uses the Joint Capabilities Integration and Development System (JCIDS) process for force modernization. This process identifies a 'capability gap' between the capabilities of the U.S. military and that of the enemy, and then proposes changes to fill that gap. Thus, if we are analyzing COGs based on the capabilities of the U.S. military, then we will

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[80] Dale Eikmeier, "Modernizing the Center of Gravity Concept–So it Works," in *Addressing the FOG of COG*, ed. Celestino Perez (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press), 143.

[81] Ibid.

[82] Ibid., 151.

[83] Ibid., 143.

never identify a capability gap and adapt to fill it. This is much of the reason why the cyber program has not been operationalized; commanders and staffs are biasing their COG analysis to account for their own capabilities and not identifying the capabilities that they actually need.

Although there are differences in opinion on the Salafist-jihadi COGs at each of the levels of war, these difference are typically generated by a fundamental disagreement on why a COG analysis is conducted in the first place. COL (Ret) Eikmeier's COG analysis is conducted from a U.S. military capability perspective and identifies what can targeted with the current capabilities; by focusing on the present, risk is assumed by not forcing innovation for the future. Others conduct a COG analysis to aid in the understanding of the enemy's structure, objectives, and strategy. When a COG analysis is conducted with these objectives in mind, the COG of the Salafist-jihadi movement at the strategic level of war is its ideology; because its ideology is what connects the movement to the groups and the groups to the population. Ideologies can be targeted and degraded, but it will take fundamental changes in U.S. military operations and doctrine to create the capabilities necessary to counter the ideology.

U.S. military CT/COIN Strategies and Doctrine

The current National Security Strategy (NSS) 2015 describes the U.S. Government's strategy to combat terrorism. Although the strategy is consistent with current research and information, it has an underlying tone that is focused on decisive action and 'prioritized counterterrorism operations'. It describes the situations when the USG will not hesitate to use the military to conduct decisive action; these situations are described as being "when there is a continuing, imminent threat, and when capture or

other actions to disrupt the threat are not feasible."[84] It is important to note that these requirements have a low threshold and can easily be used by a Combatant Commander to justify the use force. For example, if a non-lethal measure directed against the ideology will take months to produce results, it may be seen as less feasible when compared to a lethal measure directed against the group's leadership that could produce results the same day; even though the two results that are being compared are drastically different in nature.

JP 3-26, *Counterterrorism*, describes the role of the National Security Council as "the key integrator of the President's whole-of-government CT policy and strategies . . . the key interagency policy committee of CT is the Counterterrorist Security Group."[85] Within the homeland, the Department of Homeland Security leads the USG's CT operations and is primarily responsible for protecting Americans from terrorist attacks.[86] The Department of State (DOS) has CT responsibilities abroad, "except for CT within regions where the responsibility lies with the military commander as designated by the President."[87] To execute its CT duties, the DOS created the Bureau of Counterterrorism (formally known as the Office for Combating Terrorism and the Coordinator for Counterterrorism). In 1998, Congress formally defined the principle duty and role of the

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[84] Barack Obama, *National Security Strategy* (Washington, DC: The White House, 2015), 9.

[85] Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Publication (JP) 3-26, *Counterterrorism,* viii.

[86] Department of Homeland Security, *Prevent Terrorism and Enhance Security*, 2 October 2010, accessed 14 April 2015, http:www.dhs.gov/prevent-terrorism-and-enhance-security.

[87] Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Publication (JP) 3-26, *Counterterrorism,* viii.

Coordinator of the Bureau of Counterterrorism as "the supervision (including policy oversight of resources) of international counterterrorism activities . . . the coordinator shall have the rank and status of Ambassador at Large."[88]

In 2004, as a result of the 9/11 Commission, Congress published the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act (IRTPA). One of the components of the act was the establishment of the National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC). The act describes the primary missions of the National Counterterrorism Center shall be as follows:

1. "To serve as the primary organization in the USG for analyzing and integrating all intelligence possessed or acquired by the USG pertaining to terrorism and CT, excepting intelligence pertaining exclusively to domestic terrorists and domestic CT.
2. To conduct strategic operational planning for CT activities, integrating all instruments of national power, including diplomatic, financial, military, intelligence, homeland security, and law enforcement activities within and among agencies.
3. To assign roles and responsibilities as part of its strategic operational planning duties to lead Departments or agencies…but shall not direct the execution of any resulting operations.
4. To ensure that agencies, as appropriate, have access to and receive all-source intelligence support needed to execute their CT plans or perform independent, alternative analysis.

[88] U.S. Department of State, "Who We Are," accessed 14 April 2015, www.state.gov/j/ct/about/index.htm.

5. To ensure that such agencies have access to and receive intelligence needed to accomplish their assigned activities.

6. To serve as the central and shared knowledge bank on known and suspected terrorists and international terror groups."[89]

Within the NCTC is the Directorate of Strategic Operational Planning. This Directorate "provides operational plans for counterterrorism operations . . . to include the mission, objectives to be achieved, tasks to be performed, interagency coordination of operational activities, and the assignment of roles and responsibilities."[90] One of the problems with this organization is that the Directorate of Strategic Operational Planning resides within the NCTC, which doesn't actually command and control any of the government agencies that will employ the strategy that they produce. The U.S. Government attempts to use a whole-of-government approach, but fails to identify any agency or individual responsible for the planning, synchronization, and execution of the strategy.

JP 3-26 gives legitimacy (from the perception of the local populace regarding U.S. military actions) and objective (the goal that operations are directed toward) as the most important principles that govern CT operations. But, most interestingly, is the discussion on balance in JP 3-26 explaining that "overly defensive action cedes the initiative to the terrorists and provides them the time and space to potentially grow into

[89] U.S. Congress, *Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act*, 108th Congress, 2004, 37.

[90] Ibid., 39.

strategic threats."[91] The offensive tone of CT operations, oddly discussed in the section on balance, sets the tone for the rest of the manual. There is very little discussion about MISO, cyber, or information operations; instead, much of the manual is directed at Lines of Operation (LOO) focused on defeating the terrorist organization, countering WMD and materials, enabling host nation CT forces, and establishing regional CT coordination centers.

JP 3-26 gives 'key leaders' or a 'permissive operating environment' as examples of the operational level COGs of terrorist organizations.[92] Overall, JP 3-26 is written in an offensive tone that inadvertently points the reader toward CT operations designed at defeating key leaders. It only mentions ideology a total of five times throughout the entire manual and it list 'countering violent extremist ideology' as seventh in priorities in the goals of CT operations. Although, in its own definition of terrorism that it gives in the opening chapter, it mentions that terrorism is motivated by ideological beliefs, no effort is made to enlighten the reader on how best to target what's behind those motivations or how to counter those ideological beliefs. The defeat mechanisms that JP 3-26 outline are to "identify, disrupt, isolate, and dismantle terrorist organizations."[93] This manual is an example of doctrine written and directed at an easy COG that actually exits in the physical sense (terrorist organizations, key leaders, key nodes), instead of a more difficult but more correct COG (its ideology).

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[91] Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Publication (JP) 3-26, *Counterterrorism,* II-1.

[92] Ibid., IV-12.

[93] Ibid., IV-11.

JP 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*, outlines a comprehensive approach to counterinsurgency. This approach has four functional components: political strategy, security, economic function, and information. Each of these four components contribute to the host nation government obtaining control over its environment. JP 3-24, in reference to host nation government controlling the environment, defines control as "the ability to contain insurgent activity (the tempo of operations, level and intensity of violence, and degree of instability that it engenders) such that the population will, in the long run, support the government against the insurgents."[94] This manual also discusses unified action in COIN and outlines the integration of the whole-of-government approach to COIN operations.

Although the NCTC provides the strategic operational planning for the War on Terror, the U.S. military strategy is derived from the *Military Strategic Plan for the War on Terrorism* published in 2006 by the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. This document describes the National Strategy as have three key elements: "protect and defend the homeland; attack terrorists and their capacity to operate effectively at home and abroad; and support mainstream efforts to reject violent extremism. The latter element is the decisive element of the strategy and is focused on the enemy's strategic center of gravity-extremist ideology."[95] It gives examples of targeting ideology as: "amplifying the voices of those who promote alternative ideas that emphasize tolerance and moderation; promoting freedom and democracy; de-legitimizing extremist

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[94] Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Publication (JP) 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*, III-7.

[95] Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, *National Military Strategic Plan for the War on Terrorism* (Washington, DC: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2006), 19.

ideological leaders; and providing alternatives to extremist education systems (e.g., some madrassas), among others."[96] The document expects the war against extremism to require decades of effort and continue to be an internal struggle within societies. It also reinforces the idea that "violent extremist movement can make new terrorists faster than the anti-terror coalition can capture or kill them. Ideological support and propaganda operations are a foundation for extremist success and a key to recruitment and indoctrination."[97] The *Military Strategic Plan for the War on Terrorism* was the most strategically sound document that I found that was produced by the U.S. military relating to the Salafist-jihadi movement. However, the document seemed to get little traction within the U.S. military and the conclusions did not translate into future doctrinal publications such as JP 3-26, *Counterterrorism*.

Summary

This chapter began with the first subchapter (A Description of the Salafist-jihadi movement) which defined and described the movement and then discussing its strengths and weaknesses. In the second subchapter (Motivational Causes of the Salafist-jihadi movement), many of the common motivational causes relating to terrorism from a historical perspective were described; these were then related to the modern day terrorist movement that the U.S. military currently faces. In the next subchapter (A Center of Gravity Analysis–Salifist-jihadi groups vs the movement), a distinction was made between the COGs of a Salafist-jihadi group compared to that of the movement due to the

[96] Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 19.

[97] Ibid., 21.

differences at each level of war. The differences of opinion relating to a COG analysis were also described in order to establish for the reader the vastly different opinions on the subject. The last subchapter (U.S. military CT/COIN Doctrine and Strategies) described the differences between CT and COIN doctrine, along with other information relating to the organization and unity of command/effort within the U.S. military regarding its strategies in the war against violent extremism.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the methodology used to conduct a qualitative case study on U.S. military CT/COIN doctrine, strategies, and the academic research involving the Salafist-jihadi movement. This chapter is broken into the following subchapters: qualitative research, qualitative case study methodology, data collection, data analysis, coding, research questions, role of researcher, standards of verification, and summary.[98]

Qualitative Research

A qualitative research methodology was selected because the goal of the research is an understanding of the complex problem and possible solutions regarding the Salafist-jihadi movement. According to Sharan B. Merriam, qualitative research is conducted when the focus of the research is to produce findings that are "comprehensive, holistic, expansive, and richly descriptive. In addition, data in the form of participants' own words, direct citations from documents . . . are likely to be included to support the findings of the study."[99] A qualitative methodology was selected in order to produce a comprehensive and holistic understanding of the documents analyzed during the research.

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[98] Sharan Merriam, *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education* (San Francisco, CA: John Wiley and Sons, 1998), 159.

[99] Ibid., 8-9.

Qualitative Case Study Methodology

In addition to qualitative research, this case study focused on the U.S. military's CT/COIN doctrine, strategies, and the academic research regarding the Salafist-jihadi movement. "A case study design is employed to gain an in-depth understanding of the situation and meaning for those involved. The interest is in process rather than outcomes, in context rather than a specific variable, in discovery rather than confirmation."[100]

Data Collection

There are three primary methods to collect data while conducting qualitative research. In general terms, the three primary methods to collect data are:

1. Conducting Effective Interviews

2. Being a Careful Observer

3. Mining Data from Documents[101]

Although each method is effective in certain types of research, for this qualitative case study, I have chosen to collect the majority of the data from documents. Glaser and Strauss, in their book "the Discovery of Grounded Theory" say it best:

> When someone stands in the library stacks, he is, metaphorically, surrounded by voices begging to be heard. Every book, every magazine article, represents at least one person who is equivalent to the anthropologist's informant or the sociologist's interviewee. In those publications, people converse, announce positions, argue with a range of eloquence, and describe events or scenes in ways entirely comparable to what is seen and heard during fieldwork.[102]

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[100] Merriam, 19.

[101] Ibid., 159.

[102] Barney Glaser, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research* (New Brunswick, NJ: Aldine Transaction Publishing, 1967), 120.

Data Analysis

When conducting this qualitative research case study, data collection and analysis occurred simultaneously. As each new document was collected, it was carefully read and analyzed; the themes and conclusions of the new document were then compared to those previously analyzed. When conducting qualitative research, this is known as the constant comparative method. In *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education*, Sharan Merriam describes the role of the researcher using this method as, "the researcher begins with a particular incident from an interview, field notes, or document and compares it with another incident in the same set of data or in another set."[103] While conducting this study, U.S. military doctrine was analyzed and compared to the themes and conclusions of the most relevant and recent academic research.

Coding

According to Creswell in his book Qualitative Inquiry, "in open coding, the researcher forms initial categories of information about the phenomenon being studied by segmenting information. Within each category, the investigator finds several properties, or subcategories, and looks for data to dimensionalize, or show the extreme possibilities on a continuum of, the property."[104] During this case study, analysis identified the following four subcategories: (1) the strategic, operational, and tactical 'sources of energy' or 'COGs' of Salafist-jihadi organizations (2) CT strategies and techniques being used by the U.S. military (3) CT strategies and techniques being recommended by

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[103] Merriam, 159.

[104] John Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Traditions* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1998), 57.

academia (4) the USG 'whole-of-government' approach–pros and cons of this strategy and execution.

Research Questions

A qualitative research case study was conducted that was designed to answer the following primary research question:

1. How can the U.S. military degrade individual Salafist-jihadi groups without giving energy to the global Salafist-jihadi movement?

Secondary research questions are:

2. What gaps exist between the U.S. military's CT strategy and doctrine and the most current research and information?

3. Why is the Salafist-jihadi movement gaining strength?

Role of Researcher

The researcher is the "primary instrument for gathering and analyzing data and, as such, can respond to the situation by maximizing opportunities for collecting and producing meaningful information."[105] "In contrast to quantitative research, which takes apart a phenomenon to examine component parts (which become the variables of the study), qualitative research can reveal how all the parts work together to form a whole."[106] This forms the foundation of the role of the researcher in this case study.

The researcher was a U.S. Army officer with a combined 42 months deployed in support of the Global War on Terrorism. "Because the primary instrument in qualitative

[105] Merriam, 20.

[106] Ibid., 6.

research is human, all observations and analyses are filtered through that human being's worldview, values, and perspective."[107] The research that was conducted in chapter two contradicted with the researcher's past experiences and commonly held beliefs; the researcher was then forced to confirm or deny some of his previously held beliefs about how U.S. military strategies and tactics are helping/hindering the individual terrorist organizations and the overall movement.

Standards of Verification

Because the researcher is human and not immune to personal bias, two primary strategies were used to increase the validity of the data: triangulation and peer examination. Triangulation is the process of "using multiple investigators, multiple sources of data, or multiple methods to confirm the emerging findings."[108] Merriam quotes Mathison (1998) on the application of triangulation who suggests "shifting the notion of triangulation away from "a technological solution for ensuring validity" and instead relying on a "holistic understanding" of the situation to construct "plausible explanations about the phenomena being studied."[109] This strategy was employed by the researcher through a process of gathering as many different sources relating to a specific area of the study, understanding the context and conclusions of each of the sources, and then drawing common themes out of those sources that are supported by the most current and substantial data.

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[107] Merriam, 22.

[108] Ibid., 204.

[109] Ibid.

The second strategy that was employed to increase validity was peer examination–"asking colleagues to comment on the findings as they emerge."[110] After the researcher collected multiple sources of data and verified them through triangulation, other colleagues were then asked to read the same data and draw their own conclusions and themes. If the colleague drew the same conclusions, then the peer examination would have then validated the conclusions drawn from the data.

Summary

A qualitative case study was selected because the goal of the research was to gain a holistic understanding of a very complex problem. During data collection, the researcher collected and analyzed U.S. military doctrine, strategies, and the relevant academic research on the Salafist-jihadi movement. The data was coded into four subcategories relating to one primary and two secondary research questions. During and after data collection, triangulation and peer reviews were conducted in order to decrease the risk of individual cognitive bias interfering with the conclusions drawn from the data.

[110] Merriam, 204.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

> War is not a chess game, but a vast social phenomenon with an infinitely greater and ever expanding number of variables, some of which elude analysis. [111]
>
> — Lieutenant Colonel David Galula (French Army), *Counterinsurgency Warfare* (1964)

Introduction

The primary research question, "How can the U.S. military degrade individual Salafist-jihadi groups without giving energy to the global Salafist-jihadi movement?" seeks to determine where and how the U.S. military should focus its energy and resources in the GWOT.

Chapter 3 provided the research methodology and explained how data was collected, coded, analyzed, and verified to answer each of the research questions. Chapter 4 now presents the analysis and findings of that qualitative research by answering the primary and secondary research questions.

Primary Research Question

How can the U.S. military degrade individual Salafist-jihadi groups without giving energy to the global Salafist-jihadi movement?

The literature review in Chapter 2 consisted of four subchapters: (1) a description of the Salifi-jihadist movement (2) motivational causes of Salifi-jihadist organizations (3) a Center of Gravity Analysis–Salafist-jihadi groups vs. the Movement (4) and U.S.

[111] Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Publication (JP) 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*, IV-1.

military CT/COIN strategies and doctrine. Each of these subchapters contributed to answering this research question.

First, not all problems have solutions that are morally acceptable or strategically sustainable. The Salafist-jihadi movement may be a problem that does not begin to have an acceptable solution for many years to come. In the meantime, understanding this complex and evolving problem is the first step. Before innovation and adaptation can occur within the U.S. military, the enemy threat that the military is innovating and fighting against has to be clearly understood. Currently, the U.S. military does not have doctrine that facilitates the analysis of terrorist organizations and contributes to providing a common understanding of these organizations. In fact, in 2009 with the publication of FM 2-01.3 (Intelligence Preparation of the Battlefield), the term doctrinal template was formally replaced with the term threat/adversary template. This was due to the belief that terrorist organizations did not have established doctrine to form a doctrinal template from.

The findings suggest that this may be due to a misunderstanding of what the term doctrine means. TRADOC Regulation 25-26 (Doctrine Publication Program) describes U.S. Army doctrine as, “Army operations are doctrine based. Army doctrine standardizes fundamental principles, tactics, techniques, procedures, and terms and symbols throughout the Army. Army doctrine forms the basis for training. It applies to all operations, describing how (not what) to think about operations and what to train. It

provides an authoritative guide for leaders and Soldiers, while allowing freedom to adapt to circumstances."[112]

Put simply, doctrine is a starting point. When applying the term to the Salafist-jihadi threat, it becomes clear that the threat has fundamental principles, tactics, techniques, and procedures that apply to its operations at each level of war. Although some tactics and techniques may be regionally based, there are common trends that run between the groups and regions. More importantly, since modern terrorism has been used since the 1880s, there is a high level of understanding within the academic community about the goals and strategies employed during terrorist campaigns.[113] Although religion is at the forefront of the current wave of terrorism,[114] the underlying strategies that different terrorist groups are using are much easier to understand when an analyst first understands how a terrorist campaign is conducted. After first achieving an understanding of terrorism, an analyst can then apply that understanding to the current situation. This base framework is what the U.S. military's doctrine lacks since the decision was made to move away from a doctrinal template.

The decision to move away from an enemy doctrinal template also had some second and third order effects. This decision put the responsibility for creating the threat/adversary template on individual intelligence cells. The down side to this is that with such a complex problem, it creates a different understanding of the problem at each

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[112] Department of the Army, TRADOC Reg 25-26*, Preparing and Publishing U.S. Army TRADOC Publications*, 6.

[113] David Rapoport, "The Four Waves of Modern Terrorism," *Anthropoetics* 8, no. 1, accessed 12 January 2015, http://www.anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap0801/terror.htm.

[114] Ibid., 3.

level of command. How the individual pieces of the enemy's network tie together and why the enemy conducted a particular attack will be interpreted differently depending on the education, experience, and common language of the staffs conducting the analysis. The lack of an enemy doctrine prevents staffs from starting from an established and definitive understanding, framework, and vocabulary; thus being able to create a more detailed and accurate enemy situation template when that enemy doctrine is applied to the current terrain, civil considerations, political environment, etc. Essentially, a doctrinal template is how the enemy wants to fight and is used to create an enemy situation template showing how the enemy is going to fight within the current operating environment. The lack of an established enemy doctrine or framework leads the U.S. military to skip the first step of the process, and jump directly to creating the enemy's situation template, void of a common understanding.

By the U.S. military not creating a definitive source of information on terrorist doctrine, it causes confusion. Members of the military educate themselves using open source documents, research, and various forms of higher education. However, each individual's cognitive biases regarding the plethora of conflicting information on the subject will inherently lead to a drastically different conclusion. These different conclusions are beneficial in certain situations, but they are not beneficial in producing innovation and change (especially bottom up innovation and change) within the military. Since the U.S. military has not established a clear framework to begin any discussion, it causes stagnation because consensus is difficult to obtain.

Within the U.S. military, it is difficult to get a consensus among field grade officers about basic topics relating to combating violent extremism. In fact, after 13 years

of fighting, there is still little consensus about what to call the current threat. Salafist-jihadi, Salafi-extremist, Salafi-purest, criminals, terrorist, insurgents, and Islamic-fundamentalist are all terms being used to describe the current threat but each sparks their own debates and disagreements. Likewise, what is the COG of the Salafist-jihadi movement? Should the U.S. military focus on fighting individual organizations or the ideology? Can the USG even fight an ideology? How should the U.S. military prioritize the use of force against an individual organization if that use of force will strengthen the message of the West's War on Islam? Most of these opposing views exist because the U.S. military has not created a shared understanding to begin the analysis by developing the doctrine describing how terrorist organizations operate, their goals and strategies. With so many different points of view and ideas about the problem, any proposed change at a lower level will only be hampered at a higher level of command that has a different understanding of the problem. This issue is addressed in more detail in the Recommendations section of Chapter 5.

Second, after understanding the problem, the words that are used to describe the problem are important. As the saying goes, "words have meaning." The words that are used shape our understanding of the problem and eventually shape the courses of action that are chosen to confront the problem. A recent RAND study says:

> Whatever we call it, do not expect the fighters and terrorists of the Salafist jihad to confine themselves to traditional insurgent tactics, which are typically geared toward winning the widest possible popular sympathy as a way of gaining national political control. Likewise, calling jihad *insurgency* does not signify that the means and methods of traditional COIN are entirely appropriate . . . while expert opinion might differ on whether the nomenclature of insurgency and COIN

> is apt in this case, it is surely better than that of terrorism and counterterrorism, which describes only a weapon of choice.[115]

However, this weapon of choice is only used at the tactical level of war. At higher levels, terrorist organizations have terrorist campaigns that are linked within their overall strategy. Because of this, the USG and the U.S. military are creating cognitive biases by the words that are being used to describe the problem. If the root word 'terror' is going to be used, then it and associated words such as terrorist campaigns, terrorist goals, and terrorist strategies should be defined and described within U.S. military doctrine. Currently, JP 1-02 only defines the words 'terrorism' and 'terrorist threat level'.[116]

Lastly, the USG and the U.S. military has not appointed a Commander to establish both strategic direction and command and control for combating violent extremism. The Congressional Act that established the NCTC specifically stated that the NCTC was: (1) "To conduct strategic operational planning for CT activities, integrating all instruments of national power, including diplomatic, financial, military, intelligence, homeland security, and law enforcement activities within and among agencies (2) To assign roles and responsibilities as part of its strategic operational planning duties to lead Departments or agencies…*but shall not direct the execution of any resulting operations (emphasis added).*"[117] This Act intentionally separated the organization responsible for strategic operational planning for CT activities and the integration of the instruments of national power from the command and control of the organizations that are executing

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[115] Gompert, 24.

[116] Headquarters Department of the Army, Field Manual (FM) 1-02, 1-65.

[117] U.S. Congress, 37.

those plans. This undermines the purpose of unified action by not producing unity of effort between governmental and nongovernmental entities with military operations.

With regards to unity of command, the research findings conclude that the only person who possesses command and control authority over all of the organizations that are implementing the CT strategies is the President of the United States (Commander in Chief, CINC). The CINC then coordinates combating violent extremism through the use of his regionally aligned Combatant Commanders. This creates a situation where the war against violent extremism is being piecemealed together with limited strategic direction. Because the CINC is the only person with overall command and control, and he in turn relies on his individual Combatant Commanders, the war is being waged against individual organizations within each combatant command instead of as a war against a terrorist movement that extends across the globe. Although it is a global war against violent extremism, there is not a Global Commander, with the exception of the CINC. In order for the U.S. military to degrade individual Salafist-jihadi organizations without giving energy to the movement, coordination of U.S. military actions against individual organizations has to be controlled by a higher military commander or agency (that is not the CINC). This higher command and control echelon or agency currently does not exist.

Research Question 2

What gaps exist between the U.S. military's CT strategy and doctrine and the most current research and information?

Gap 1: Decapitating a terrorist leader will degrade the terrorist organization

Kinetically targeting leaders is a common counterterror and counterinsurgency tactic; however, decapitation strikes have not proven to be a cost-effective strategy.[118] "In a rigorous analysis of the 298 cases of leadership decapitation from 1945 to 2004, Jordan concluded that younger and smaller organizations are more vulnerable to such strikes than larger and/or more developed institutions. Whereas religious organizations are resilient to decapitation, nonreligious ideological organizations are more susceptible to collapse after decapitation."[119] Based on this research, when considering the religious nature of Salafist-jihadi organizations, the U.S. military has a small window where a decapitation strategy may prove effective against religious organizations. That window significantly closes after the group reaches a strength of over 500 individuals and continues to close further as the group grows older.[120]

According to Jordan, "once the group exceeds a membership of five hundred, the utility of decapitation is negative. In fact, for groups with between five hundred and one thousand members, decapitated groups fall apart 46 percent less than they would otherwise. Overall, this data indicate that decapitation has little benefit as a

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[118] Jordan, 719-755.

[119] Paul Tompkins, *Human Factor Considerations of Undergrounds in Insurgencies* (Fort Bragg, NC: The United States Special Operations Command, 2013), 108.

[120] Jordan, 719-755.

counterterrorism strategy and is in fact highly counterproductive for larger groups."[121] U.S. military doctrine is lacking any qualitative data that enables commanders and staffs to understand and effectively predict the effects of a decapitation. This issue in discussed further in the Recommendations section of chapter 5.

Gap 2: The belief that the charismatic leader is the operational or strategic COG of the terrorist organization

If the U.S. military views a charismatic terrorist leader as the COG of a group, then one would deduce that killing that leader would have a substantial negative impact on the group's strategic level strength and capabilities. Dr. Milan Vego, in his researches on the subject, observed, "An enemy is not fully defeated until the relevant mass of power–the relevant center of gravity–is defeated. Vego differentiated centers of gravity into nonmilitary and military types. The former could include the will to fight, a key leader, an ideology, or a government's legitimacy. The latter could be a military force or function, such as an elite formation or command and control."[122] However, Dr. Vego differentiated between COGs in regular versus irregular warfare.

Regarding the COG in irregular warfare, Dr. Vego has some significant insights. "First, the strategic objective is predominantly nonmilitary and is often ideological in nature. As an example, ideology is a critical strength of al Qaeda."[123] Dr. Antulio Echevarria again reinforces this point after his analysis of Clausewitz's COG concept,

[121] Jordan, 747.

[122] Klug, 18.

[123] Ibid., 19.

which concluded, "al Qaeda's strategic center of gravity may be its ideology."[124] Additionally, *The National Military Strategic Plan for the War on Terrorism* agrees with Vego that the ideology is the strategic center of gravity for the Salafist-jihadi movement.

However, JP 3-26 does not agree and list key leaders and a permissive operating environment as the operational COGs of terrorist organizations and makes no mention of potential strategic COGs. JP 3-26 then list the following operational approach objectives against a terrorist organization: (1) conduct intelligence operations (2) shape the operational environment (3) conduct raids and strikes against personnel/infrastructure. (4) interdict/attack supporting groups in other regions. These objectives are aimed at the desired endstate condition of "terrorist organization X incapable or unwilling to conduct terrorist acts."[125] With JP 3-26 describing how the U.S. military conducts CT operations, it is clear why there is an inclination toward decapitation strikes as the primary tool of the U.S. military.

Regardless of the disagreement between experts about what the COG of individual Salafist-jihadi groups are, there should at least be consensus within the U.S. military about what they are not. If the organization in greater than 500 strong and is religious in nature, the leader most likely will not be the strategic COG; the conclusions drawn from Jordan's research on the 298 cases of decapitation show that killing the leader actually increases the resiliency of the organization under these circumstances. Similarly, leaders are not the strategic COG of the larger Salifi-jihadist movement.

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[124] Klug, 20.

[125] Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Publication (JP) 3-26, *Counterterrorism,* IV-12.

Recognizing this point is the first step in allowing the U.S. military to shift from a decapitation strategy to a strategy that is focused on countering the ideology itself.

Formally recognizing that the ideology is the strategic COG in U.S. military doctrine will help the military recognize that when a leader or individual needs to be lethally targeted, the methods of targeting have significant differences in their effect on the enemy's ideology. For example, the media and its effects on each different population including the American public, allies, the host nation population, terrorist, and potential recruits or sympathizers needs to be understood more clearly. James Walsh, of the Institute of Homeland Security Solutions, says "There is considerable evidence that coverage of terrorism increases fear and anxiety and that these emotional changes influence the preference of some members of the public for CT policies that rely of force."[126] Because of this, the USG finds itself in a difficult situation where the strategically sound decision to conduct a clandestine operation or to use a proxy may not feed the need of the American public to see immediate results; this can result in highly visible drone strikes followed by press conferences that only add fuel to the Salafist-jihadi movement's message of the West's War on Islam.

When compared to JP 3-26, *Counterterrorism*, JP 3-24, *Counterinsurgency* better applies to the Salafist-jihadi movement. Where JP 3-26 is more focused on kinetic operations targeting key leaders, JP 3-24 focuses on the root causes of the insurgency and on countering the insurgent narrative and messaging. JP 3-24 uses unified action and the whole-of-government approaches to help the host nation government gain legitimacy and

[126] James Walsh, *Media Attention to Terrorist Attacks: Causes and Consequences* (Durham, NC: Duke University, Institue for Homeland Security Solutions, 2010), 2.

control over its environment. When comparing these two manuals, it reaffirms that the global Salafist-jihadi movement is more insurgent than terrorist in nature. However, the U.S. military's counterinsurgency manuals still fall short in addressing the fundamental differences between terrorist versus insurgent strategies and goals.

Gap 3: Combating Violent Extremism with
CT vs COIN doctrine

There is much debate on this topic. This debate is on the fundamental issue of whether terrorism is a tactic used within an insurgency, or whether terrorism is a form of warfare all its own. The next few paragraphs will outline the two schools of thought, my analysis on the two schools, and then compare and contrast CT vs COIN doctrine.

On one hand, as David Gompert points out in his article *Heads We Win: The Cognitive Side of Counterinsurgency,* because the Salafist-jihadi movement is not just a terrorist movement, it "can and should be viewed as the first truly global insurgency."[127] This school of thought treats terrorism as a tactic that is used within irregular warfare and insurgency operations. Since a military can not wage a war against a tactic, then it should be viewed through the lens of an insurgency. As a recent RAND study says, "The violent global Salafist insurgency aims not so much to rule this or that nation-state as to overturn the existing Western-dominated nation-state order, at least within the Muslim-majority parts of the world. To that end, it uses a mix of terror, asymmetric warfare, propaganda, and popular legitimacy akin to that of traditional insurgency….Jihadis see themselves, and are widely seen, as this community's champions and defenders."[128] From this school

[127] Gompert, 23.

[128] Ibid., 24.

of thought, U.S. military doctrine continues to incorrectly categorize Salafist-jihadi as terrorist instead of more appropriately labeling them as insurgents who are using terrorist tactics.

However, there is another school of thought where terrorism is not just viewed as a tactic. Instead, it is viewed as a type of warfare all its own that is similar to, but not identical to an insurgency. This school of reasoning looks at terrorism from a historical perspective and focuses more on the operational and strategic levels of war. From this viewpoint, terrorist campaigns have their own strategies which can be generally categorized into: (1) attrition, (2) intimidation, (3) provocation, (4) spoiling, (5) and outbidding.[129] From this logic, if terrorism has its own strategies, it is not simply a tactic found within an insurgency and should be considered as its own type of warfare.

My findings on this subject suggest that at the strategic and operational levels of war, terrorism is more than a tactic. There are many terrorist organizations that do not fit inside the insurgency model at each (or any) level of war. For example, Hezbollah is not conducting an insurgency against Lebanon and actually holds seats within the Lebanese parliament. Hezbollah is not directing its violence against the Lebanese government or the Lebanese people; instead, it focuses its violence against Israel. So if it is not conducting an insurgency against either Lebanon or Israel, how do you describe it using U.S. military doctrine? Instead of an insurgency, in the framework outlined in *The Strategies of Terrorism*, Hezbollah would be executing an attrition strategy aimed at the

[129] Andrew Kydd, "The Strategies of Terrorism," *International Security* 31, no. 1 (2006): 51.

will of the Israeli people with the goal of territorial change.[130] Similar to Hezbollah, many other terrorist organizations are not conducting an insurgency and are instead using terrorism as a strategy. Calling terrorism simply a tactic found within insurgencies can sometimes lead the analyst and the operations cell in the wrong direction depending on what level of war and on what terrorist organization they are conducting analysis.

Regardless of which school of thought ends up prevailing, the U.S. military needs to create the common language, framework, and understanding. With regards to terrorism, U.S. military doctrine fails to provide any common understanding. When comparing JP 3-24 (COIN) to JP 3-26 (CT), there is a drastic difference in how the two types of operations are viewed and described. JP 3-24 spends the first two chapters discussing what an insurgency is, how the enemy organizes to fight one, and describes the fundamentals of a COIN campaign. This is contrasted by JP 3-26 which never describes terrorist operations or helps the reader understand terrorism; it simply states how the U.S. military will organize and fight against it. Without first starting with a shared understanding of the threat, the U.S. military is fighting an uphill battle in creating a successful CT campaign. The table of contents of both manuals are below to allow the reader to compare and contrast the chapters and subchapters.

[130] Kydd, 51.

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Source: Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Publication (JP) 3-24, *Counterinsurgency* (Washington, DC: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2013), v.

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Source: Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Publication (JP) 3-26, *Counterterrorism* (Washington, DC: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2014), v.

The manual that describes the analysis of terrorist organizations in the greatest detail is JP 3-07.2, *Antiterrorism*. This is interesting because antiterrorism is defined as "defensive measures used to reduce the vulnerabilities to terrorist acts,"[131] Because the principles found in this manual are defensive in nature and focused on establishing force protection measures as opposed to the offensive measures found in JP 3-26, *Counterterrorism*, it is not the manual that most analyst would turn to when evaluating a terrorist organization; nevertheless, this manual has the most complete descriptions of terrorist motivations, groups, and tools that are designed to aid in enemy analysis. The down side to this manual it that because it is written for force protection, it is entirely focused on terrorism at the tactical level.

Research Question 3

Why is the Salafist-jihadi movement gaining strength?

Many assume that the motivations for terrorism are environmental factors such as a poor economy, poverty, hopelessness, or the lack of a democratic government. Although these factors do play a role, the motivational causes of terrorism fall within three categories: psychological causes, ideological causes, and feelings of revenge.[132] "With regards to individual level psychological causes, the results of the research indicate that with exceptions, of course, most of the terrorists from different ideological motivations were not depressed or mentally disordered or had ever suffered from

[131] Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Publication (JP) 3-07.2*, Antiterrorism* (Washington, DC: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2006), ix.

[132] Sutalan, 8.

childhood trauma."[133] Based on the research by Sutalan, joining a terrorist organization typically is not a last resort but instead an enticing opportunity to many new recruits.

There are psychological conditions related to the group that are shown to be significant motivational causes for terrorist behaviors. In his book, *The Causes of Terrorism*, Sutalan states "Once they become a member of a terrorist organization, they need group identity. This group identity is based on trust both among the terrorists and in the group as a whole. The commitment of the terrorists to their cause combined with this trust isolate them from the society. Hence, terrorists form a closed community that it is not possible to leave once involved except a great cost and at the risk of losing one's life."[134] The ideological motivational causes that current groups are using, such as reestablishing a Muslim Caliphate or returning life back to the days of the Salifi, are the tools that the terrorist leaders use to create the 'group-think'. "Throughout history, terrorism has appeared in many ideological disguises like religious fanaticism, anarchism, fascism, neo-fascism, separatism, nationalism, micro-nationalism and racism. This group-think is developed in order to provide cohesiveness within the group and it is given a high priority by members of the group."[135] This is not a new phenomenon; history can play a large role is aiding in the understanding of how these groups and movements start, grow, and survive/die.

The Salifi-jihadist movement has numerous strengths, which were discussed in detail in Chapter 2. Primarily, the movement derives its strength from the collective

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[133] Sutalan, 8.

[134] Ibid.

[135] Ibid., 9.

message and ideology of each of its groups. Many of the groups have different interpretations of specific passages of the Koran and Hadiths, such as what constitutes an apostate, whether killing other Muslims is forbidden, views on the killing of civilians, or whether suicide bombings are justified. These differing views combine together to form a message and ideology that can appeal to larger segments of the population because potential recruits are able to align themselves with the group that holds similar interpretations of religious passages as themselves.

Many Salifi-jihadist groups such as al Qaeda and ISIS produce publications to inform and influence their supporters and to aid in recruiting. Videos released by these groups are increasing in production quality and frequency, which highlights the groups' reliance on them to get their message out to the masses. Although the *National Military Strategic Plan for the War on Terrorism* highlights that ideology is the strategic center of gravity and that "ideological support and propaganda operations are a foundation for extremist success and a key to recruitment and indoctrination,"[136] terrorist groups are still able to get their message to a broad audience. Terrorist groups, as opposed to insurgent groups, do not need to gain the support of a significant portion of the population to be successful; they only need to recruit a small percentage of active supporters to their cause. If this small percentage of terrorist are using an intimidation strategy in an area with a weak central government, the terrorist can be successful in reaching their goals without gaining support from the majority of the population.

Each month ISIS publishes their latest issue of *Dabiq* where they rally support for their cause and call for worldwide attacks on Western interest. Each issue is around 40-80

[136] Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 23.

pages long and full of high-resolution photographs that are reminiscent of an issue of National Geographic Magazine. Each issue has the same section entitled "In the Words of the Enemy." In this section, quotes are taken from a Western individual or group that support the idea that ISIS is undefeatable and any Western backed campaign against them is futile. Members of RAND research teams have been quoted, along with U.S. politicians such as Senator John McCain.[137] To date, the USG has not been effective at degrading their propaganda operations and cutting off their primary means to recruit.

Finally, as a NATO Science for Peace and Security publication points out, "Feelings of revenge are a pivotal point for fueling terrorism and appear as a deadlock in efforts to end terrorism. In addition to the unsolved conflicts (such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict), wrong or wrongly implemented counterterrorism policies involve the risk of creating feelings of revenge. . . . Hence the struggle against terrorism should be initiated not only against the terrorist, but all the components of the terrorist network. Otherwise it is impossible to win this struggle."[138] As stated earlier, the overly offensive nature of the U.S. military's CT strategies and the overreliance of a highly public decapitation strategy reinforces the message of the West's War on Islam and strengthens the Salifi-jihadist movement.

Summary

This chapter provided analysis on the data collected and answered the primary research question: "How can the U.S. military degrade individual Salafist-jihadi groups

[137] Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), "In the Words of the Enemy," *Dabiq*, Issues 1-8.

[138] Sutalan, 10.

without giving energy to the global Salafist-jihadi movement"? In addition, this chapter address the two secondary research questions: (1) What gaps exist between the U.S. military's CT strategy and doctrine and the most current research and information? (2) Why is the Salafist-jihadi movement gaining strength?

In answering these three research questions, the following themes emerged and were discussed in detail in this chapter:

1. Threat templates are no longer doctrinally based and are reliant on the experience/education of the staff.

2. The U.S. military does not have a common framework to facilitate the analysis of terrorist organizations, goals, and strategies.

3. Incomplete source of military terms and definitions regarding terrorism

4. There is little shared understanding within the U.S. military regarding terrorism.

5 There is little consensus about terrorism being a tactic found within insurgencies vs. a form of warfare.

6. There is little consensus about whether to use CT vs. COIN strategies.

7. The command structure within the U.S. military does not facilitate a global strategy against violent extremism.

8. The U.S. military overvalues the importance of a charismatic leader within a terrorist organization.

9. There is little consensus about the COG within irregular warfare and whether it should be tangible vs. intangible.

10. The lack of consensus and the absence of a common understanding impede innovation within the U.S. military.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

> Without a clear framework—any discussion, no matter how absurd becomes valid. Without Joint agreement or acceptable arguments, there are too many interpretations which lead to "a paralysis by analysis."
>
> — LTC Adelaido Godinez, US Army

Primary Research Question

How can the U.S. military degrade individual Salafist-jihadi groups without giving energy to the global Salafist-jihadi movement?

The U.S. military has been slow to adapt to the Salafist-jihadi threat. From looking at historical examples of militaries who successfully innovated during an interwar period, the common theme is that to successfully innovate, there needs to be a clear enemy.[139] Williamson Murray, who wrote *Military Innovation in the Interwar Period* which is studied at the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, summarized it by saying, "Without the intellectual effort and institutional commitment to evolve a vision of future war, military institutions will almost certainly fail to take the first halting steps toward peacetime innovation."[140] The U.S. military has not taken the current threat, which is admittedly more complex than traditional military threats, and created a common understanding of the enemy's fundamental principles, tactics, techniques, and procedures. In the absence of an enemy doctrine, circular arguments and differences in understanding hamper the military's ability to innovate. Therefore, the U.S.

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[139] Williamson Murray, *Military Innovation in the Interwar Period* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 369-405.

[140] Ibid., 406.

military has not made the intellectual effort and created a doctrine that develops a shared understanding throughout DOD. Without this shared understanding, the U.S. military will not be able to adapt its organization, its equipment, and especially its psyche to confront the roots of violent extremism.

For example, simply reading the definitions of COIN and CT highlight the glaring problem that the U.S. military faces within its doctrine:

> Counterinsurgency (COIN): a comprehensive civilian and military effort designed to simultaneously defeat and contain insurgency and address its root causes.[141]

> Counterterrorism (CT): actions and activities to neutralize terrorists, their organizations, and networks in order to render them incapable of using violence to instill fear and coerce governments or societies to achieve their goals.[142]

From these definitions, it is clear that COIN is focused on addressing the root causes where CT is not. However, at the strategic level, is the U.S. military conducting a COIN or CT campaign? Since it appears that the U.S. military is conducting CT, are the root causes of terrorism being addressed effectively by other USG agencies and does the U.S. military's operations support or hinder those other agencies? To employ a whole-of-government approach, the U.S. military needs to focus its operations on degrading the COG of the Salafist-jihadi movement (its ideology) and addressing (or at least not fueling) the root causes of terrorism.

The next major issues that the U.S. military faces in fighting the Salifi-jihadist movement is the lack of unity of command and unity of effort. Without a single military commander in charge of the war against the Salafist-jihadi movement, the strategies

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[141] Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Publication (JP) 3-24, *Counterinsurgency,* I-2.

[142] Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Publication (JP) 3-26, *Counterterrorism*, I-5.

developed by the NCTC will be difficult to employ and implement by operational commanders. Without unity of command, the U.S. military will have difficulty shifting from fighting isolated Salafist-jihadi organizations to focusing on a strategy that prioritizes the degradation of the movement over that of any individual group. To counter a movement that perpetuates itself from the USG's use of military force, the force used against an individual group has to be weighed against the effects on the enemy's strategic COG, its message and ideology. The U.S. military has been overly focused at the tactical and operational levels of war because it lacks a strategic level commander.

Another issue that the U.S. military, and especially the U.S. Army, has is the lack of an operationalized cyber command. Although the U.S. Army has established a Cyber Command, that command does not yet posses the capabilities or the authorities that are needed to degrade the Salafist-jihadi propaganda machine. An operationalized cyber command that works directly for the commander of the war against violent extremism should have the ability to immediately respond to new websites or sources of propaganda. There are many ways that an operationalized cyber command could have a direct impact on the funding and recruitment of these organizations without having the negative consequences associated with drone strikes and other lethal targeting. Without adding fuel to the enemy's message and ideology, an operationalized cyber command, with the laws and policies to support their operations, could have a dramatic impact in the war against violent extremism.

Research Question 2

What gaps exist between the U.S. military's CT strategy and doctrine and the most current research and information?

The analysis found that there are three major differences between U.S. military doctrine and strategies and those proposed by the academic community. First, the U.S. military is overly reliant on its ability to decapitate terrorist organizations. Although there are certain situations where this is an effective technique, the research suggest that it is counterproductive the majority of the time against the religious organizations that the Salafist-jihadi movement is composed of. If the U.S. military misses the window where the organization is less than 500 strong,[143] than if the U.S. military chooses to use a decapitation strategy, then it should do so cautiously and attempt to mitigate the adverse effects. Generally, the more public the decapitation is, the less effective it will be at degrading the Salafist-jihadi movement because it will validate the message of the West's War on Islam.

This decapitation strategy is partly justified by over valuing the impact of the charismatic terrorist leader in the organization. Although a charismatic leader is important to the organization, especially when the organization is young and small in numbers, as the organization grows the leader becomes more replaceable. A shift occurs where the leader is leading the organization to where the leader is guiding his guiding coalition.[144] Once this shift occurs, the leader's value becomes far less important and decapitating that leader will most likely increase its resiliency by making it either

[143] Jordan, 719-755.

[144] Kotter, 35-67.

fragment, or by making other leaders step up. To keep an organization at the cutting edge, change has to occur. In many ways, the U.S. military is forcing that change and spawning individual initiative within the organization with the decapitation approach.

Over valuing the leader's importance has led to many members of the U.S. military, and doctrine writers, to name those leaders as COGs of their organizations. After years of performing the decapitation strategy and from research such as Jordan's, this belief has proven to be flawed. The U.S. military lacks doctrine that reflects the importance of the ideology and that clarifies the importance of the terrorist leader by including the window in which that leader holds significant value.

Lastly, by changing how the U.S. military describes the war against the Salafist-jihadi movement, it will change the mindset of those charged with implementing the strategies. By defining the current threat as a fight against terrorism, members of the U.S. military instinctively turn to counterterrorism techniques instead of counter insurgency techniques. Although neither fit the Salafist-jihadi threat perfectly, at least at the tactical level of war, viewing the problem from an insurgency perspective is far better than just focusing on a specific tactic that they are using. However, even using JP 3-24 will leave gaps in the analysis and lead to a less than optimum course of action. Counterterrorism doctrine needs to be refined to incorporate lessons learned and the relevant academic research.

Research Question 3

Why is the Salafist-jihadi movement gaining strength?

Like a Chinese finger trap, the more force that the U.S. military uses, the stronger the enemy becomes. "While firepower has a place in global COIN, it cannot substitute for

improved abilities to take away the advantage that the Salafist-jihadi currently hold on the cognitive plane. To defeat an enemy that has figured out how to use U.S. military power to perpetuate itself, it will take the best thinking that can be marshaled."[145] The U.S. military needs to formulate and execute a strategy focused on defeating the enemy's ideology, and not individual terrorist organizations. As long as the military continues to use force as its primary tool against these individual organizations, the Salafist-jihadi movement will continue to gain strength. The West cannot continue to play into the enemy's hands by publically validating their message that the West is waging a War on Islam.

RECOMMENDATIONS

U.S. military doctrine: A Starting Point

The U.S. military lacks doctrine describing terrorism or terrorist campaigns. In the 1980's, faced with a threat from the Soviet Union, the U.S. Army released a series of three field manuals that described the Soviet threat. Following is the abstract from FM 100-2 (The Soviet Army):

> This field manual is part of FM series 100-2, The Soviet Army. The other volumes are FM 100-2-2, The Soviet Army: Specialized Warfare and Rear Area Support, and FM 100-2-3, The Soviet Army: Troops, Organization and Equipment. These manuals cannot stand-alone but should be used interchangeably. These field manuals serve as the definitive source of unclassified information on Soviet ground forces and their interaction with other services in combined arms warfare. These manuals represent the most current unclassified information and they will be updated periodically. This field manual describes the operations and tactics of Soviet general purpose ground forces. The content is based on information in Soviet writings and other open source literature. Most available information is focused on potential battle in Central Europe. This manual reflects that focus. Through Soviet military activity extends to other parts

[145] Gompert, 36.

> of the world, the Soviet forces opposite NATO represent a general model for Soviet forces elsewhere, as well as for forces of Soviet allies and surrogates.[146]

In the 1980s, this series of three field manuals helped foster innovation, training, equipping, and manning within the U.S. Army. Even though the current generation of young officers in the military has done multiple combat deployments in the Global War on Terror, there is a drastically different level of understanding within the military regarding terrorist organizations, goals, and strategies. By no means should the U.S. military completely pivot toward defeating an irregular warfare threat and compromise its ability to defeat conventional threats; but in order to adapt to the enemy that the U.S. military will continue to fight for the foreseeable future, a common understanding is necessary.

After 13 years of fighting against violent extremism, is there a common understanding of terrorist goals and strategies within the U.S. military? Kydd and Walter in *The Strategies of Terrorism* give five principle strategic logics of terrorist campaigns: "(1) attrition, (2) intimidation, (3) provocation, (4) spoiling, and (5) outbidding."[147] Regarding goals, they went on explain that "Although the ultimate goals of terrorist has varied over time, five have had enduring importance: regime change, territorial change, policy change, social control, and status quo maintenance."[148] According to Kydd and Walter, "effective counterstrategies cannot be designed without first understanding the

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[146] Headquarters Department of the Army, Field Manual (FM) 100-2-1, *The Soviet Army: Operations and Tactics* (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 1984), i.

[147] Kydd, 51.

[148] Ibid.

strategic logic that drives terrorist violence. Terrorism works not simply because it instills fear in target populations, but because it causes governments and individuals to respond in ways that aid the terrorists' cause."[149] Counter to this idea, U.S. military doctrine doesn't have one chapter focused on understanding terrorist strategies or goals. As discussed in more detail in chapter 4, JP 3-26 never describes terrorism, nor does it aid in the analysis of terrorist organizations.

If someone employing counterterrorism techniques does not first ask themselves what strategy that the enemy is employing, they will never be able to design the most effective CT strategy. In conventional operations, the enemy situation template would never simply depict the enemy conducting 'offensive operations'. Yet, with regards to terrorism, the US military does not have the vocabulary in its doctrine to describe what its goals and strategies are. In the absence of this doctrine, staffs impose conventional doctrine onto terrorist organizations; this only adds to the misunderstanding of the terrorist organizations.

The U.S. military needs a starting point for analysis. I recommend a series of three manuals be developed that aid in developing a common understanding of terrorist organizations and movements. Each individual manual should be focused on each level of war. For example, the titles of the manuals could be:

1. A Strategic Guide to the Analysis of Terrorist Movements and Groups
2. Terrorist Campaigns, Goals, and Operations
3. Tactics and Trends of Terrorist Organizations by Region

[149] Kydd, 50.

Secondly, I recommend that the U.S. military institutionalize the decapitation of terrorist/insurgent leaders as a weapon system. The capability to decapitate terrorist/insurgent leaders is vital to U.S. military's operations within irregular warfare; but in order to improve this capability, the effects need to be researched, quantified, and published. In order to institutionalize it as a weapon system, the U.S. military will need to conduct quantitative research similar to Jenna Jordan's research that was discussed earlier. After conducting qualitative analysis on that research, the product should be a guide similar to the JFIRE (multi-service tactics, techniques, and procedures for the joint application of firepower) manual. This would enable commanders to visualize the effects of this particular weapon system at the tactical, operational, and strategic levels.

Within the JFIRE manual, the risk estimate distances (which are established for each weapon system through a process of quantitative analysis) are used by a commander to visualize the effects of that weapon system. Similarly, if quantitative data was given for the use of decapitation as a weapon system, then commanders and staffs would have a common understanding of the effects of that weapon system depending on the age, size, and type of threat organization that it is being employed against. This would help commanders visualize and understand when decapitation strikes are likely to be effective, and when other measures or additional mitigation of those strikes is necessary.

Depicted below are three tables presented in Jordan's findings that show the relationship between the age, size, and type of terrorist organizations and the effect of decapitation on those organizations. By conducting quantitative analysis on qualitative research such as this, the U.S. military could create a guide that aids commanders and staffs in maximizing this weapon system's effectiveness.

Table 3. Marginal Value of Leadership Decapitation by Terrorist Group Age

	0–10 years	11–20 years	21–30 Years	31–40 Years	41–50 years	50+ Years
Rate of Collapse for Decapitated Groups	28 80.00%	16 66.67%	5 31.25%	2 13.33%	0 0.00%	0 0.00%
Rate of Collapse for Non-Decapitated Groups	29 87.88%	11 73.33%	6 50.00%	3 37.50%	0 0.00%	0 0.00%
Marginal Value of Decapitation	−7.00 %	−6.66%	−18.75%	−24.17%	N/A	N/A

Source: Jenna Jordan, *When Heads Roll: Assessing the Effectiveness of Leadership Decapitation* (Abingdon, UK: Taylor and Francis Group, 2009), 746.

Table 4. Marginal Value of Leadership Decapitation by Terrorist Group Size

	0–25 members	26–100 members	101–500 members	500–1,000 members	1001–5,000 members	5,000+ members
Rate of Collapse for Decapitated Groups	10 76.92%	12 85.71%	12 50.00%	2 25.00%	5 33.33%	9 47.37%
Rate of Collapse for Non-Decapitated Groups	3 75.00%	6 75.00%	5 45.45%	5 71.43%	9 69.23%	7 70.00%
Marginal Value of Decapitation	+1.92%	+10.71%	+4.55%	−46.43%	−35.90%	−22.63%

Source: Jenna Jordan, *When Heads Roll: Assessing the Effectiveness of Leadership Decapitation* (Abingdon, UK: Taylor and Francis Group, 2009), 747.

Table 5. Marginal Value of Leadership Decapitation by Terrorist Group Type

	Non-ideological	Ideological	Non-Separatist	Separatist	Nonreligious	Religious
Rate of Collapse for	12	39	38	13	42	4
Decapitated Groups	28.57%	72.22%	64.41%	35.14%	64.38%	17.39%
Rate of Collapse for	22	27	28	21	45	4
Non-Decapitated Groups	59.46%	79.41%	71.79%	65.62%	76.27%	33.33%
Marginal Value of Decapitation	−30.89%	−7.19%	−7.38%	−30.48%	−11.89%	−15.95

Source: Jenna Jordan, *When Heads Roll: Assessing the Effectiveness of Leadership Decapitation* (Abingdon, UK: Taylor and Francis Group, 2009), 748.

Opposing Points of View

Some may argue that the 'hybrid threat' is the enemy doctrine that I'm recommending. This is not the case. First, the hybrid threat described in ADRP 3-0 is a capabilities based enemy and not ideological in nature; meaning that it is simply a combination of conventional and irregular forces, state and non-state actors, and weapons ranging from small arms to weapons of mass destruction. In all of its possible combinations, the hybrid threat spans the entire spectrum of warfare and is far too broad to foster the vision of future war that Williamson Murry argued as being key for innovation during an interwar period.[150] Furthermore, the hybrid threat doesn't have doctrine, it is simply described in various publications in varying degrees of detail. The closest that the hybrid threat comes to having doctrine is in the Decisive Action Training Environment (DATE) scenario publication, but this is a 779 page document that enables different organizations to choose different enemy capabilities that they want to fight against during an exercise.[151] In short, the hybrid threat that is depicted in the DATE publication is notional and is used for training purposes; the U.S. military needs doctrine describing terrorist movements and organizations that is written for operational purposes. The new terrorist doctrine that I'm recommending would not replace the hybrid threat model for training purposes; it instead would serve to create a common understanding within the U.S. military, aid in the analysis of terrorist organizations, and to create unity of effort throughout DOD.

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[150] Murray, 406.

[151] TRADOC G2, *Decisive Action Training Environment Version 2.0* (Ft. Leavenworth, KS: CTID, 2011).

Some may also argue that the Salafist-jihadi threat is far too complex and evolving to have a narrowly defined doctrine. First, the doctrine that I'm calling for shouldn't be narrowly defined or narrowly focused on the Salafist-jihadi threat. It should be a doctrinal template for terrorist organizations and movements, not just the Salafist-jihadi threat. The first two manuals (*A Strategic Guide to the Analysis of Terrorist Movements and Groups* and *Terrorist Campaigns, Goals, and Operations*), should focus at the strategic and operational levels of war respectively. These manuals should be grounded in the historical context of terrorism and provide insight into the modern day Salafist-jihadi threat as applicable. Only the third manual (*Tactics and Trends of Terrorist Organizations by Region*) should be focused specifically on the Salafist-jihadi threat.

Regarding the third manual, each individual group is different which should force the manual to focus on the similarities and common trends between the different regionally based groups. Together, this doctrine will enable analyst from different staff sections across the U.S. military to have a framework to understand the problem and to communicate to the commands that they support in a way that is clearly understood. It will also provide a framework to ask the right questions to ensure that a greater depth of understanding is achieved before courses of action are developed and executed.

Summary

How can the U.S. military degrade individual Salafist-jihadi groups without giving energy to the global Salafist-jihadi movement? The U.S. military has to be quicker to innovate and adapt against the current threat. The U.S. military supremacy within conventional warfare can never be compromised and this thesis does not advocate

degrading the ability to decisively defeat conventional forces; however, being effective against irregular warfare threats and conventional threats is not an either/or decision. The U.S. military can make important changes to its doctrine, organization, strategies, and capabilities that do not degrade its conventional capabilities. To do so, the U.S. military cannot innovate against al Qaeda, Boko Haram, ISIS, or any of the other sixty individual Salafist-jihadi organizations because they are too short lived and too dynamic to facilitate innovation. Nor can the U.S. military innovate against the DATE scenario publications because the enemy found within the DATE scenario is notional and designed to facilitate training, not innovation. However, the U.S. military could do a far better job of innovating against the movement itself.

To do so, the U.S. military needs to weigh in on describing the threat and how the threat is conducting operations at each level of war. This will enable agencies within the USG to have a common understanding of the threat and achieve the unified effort that is needed in executing the whole-of-government approach. The Joint Capabilities Integration and Development System (JCIDS) process needs between 2-5 years to identify a capability gap, design a solution, fund that solution, and implement that solution. This means that the U.S. military needs to create a shared understanding of the threat that will build enough consensus to see a change through this 2-5 year JCIDS process. It is time that the U.S. military establishes the framework, or at least the starting point, for creating a shared understanding of this complex problem.

As of today, 1 May 2015, the U.S. military and coalition partners have suffered 8,285 deaths and 52,312 casualties in Iraq and Afghanistan.[152] Whether the lives of these brave Soldiers were given for a worthy cause is not a question that is mine, or any other Soldier's, to ask; when our country sends us to fight, we go fight. The question that I continue to ask myself is whether we are learning and adapting fast enough to prevent the unnecessary loss of life in future conflicts. This is the question that sparked my research into this subject and after concluding my research, I fear that the U.S. military will be too slow to adapt. Without creating a shared understanding of the enemy, how can the U.S. military create the necessary change in a force of half a million Soldiers?

Even without a clear understanding of the threat, the U.S. military will continue to move forward. But depending on its orientation, forward may not be the correct direction to go. The question is whether the U.S. military has a framework established to provide a common understanding of the complex threat that it currently faces. Without first establishing this common understanding the U.S. military will continue to be slow in achieving the consensus needed in adapting to the Salafist-jihadi threat. Instead of adapting, the U.S. military will fall back on what it knows best; the use of conventional military force. However, in the war against violent extremism, conventional military force will continue to be counterproductive in degrading the Salafist-jihadi movement.

[152] Cable News Network (CNN), "Home and Away: Iraq and Afghanistan War Casualties," accessed 1 May 2015, http://www.cnn.com/SPECIALS/war.casualties/index.html.

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